

# SYNERGY

Volume 4: No.3

Exploring the Boundaries of Cinema and Entertainment



The first Superhuman-Hero...from New Jersey!

## MASTERS OF SCHLOCK

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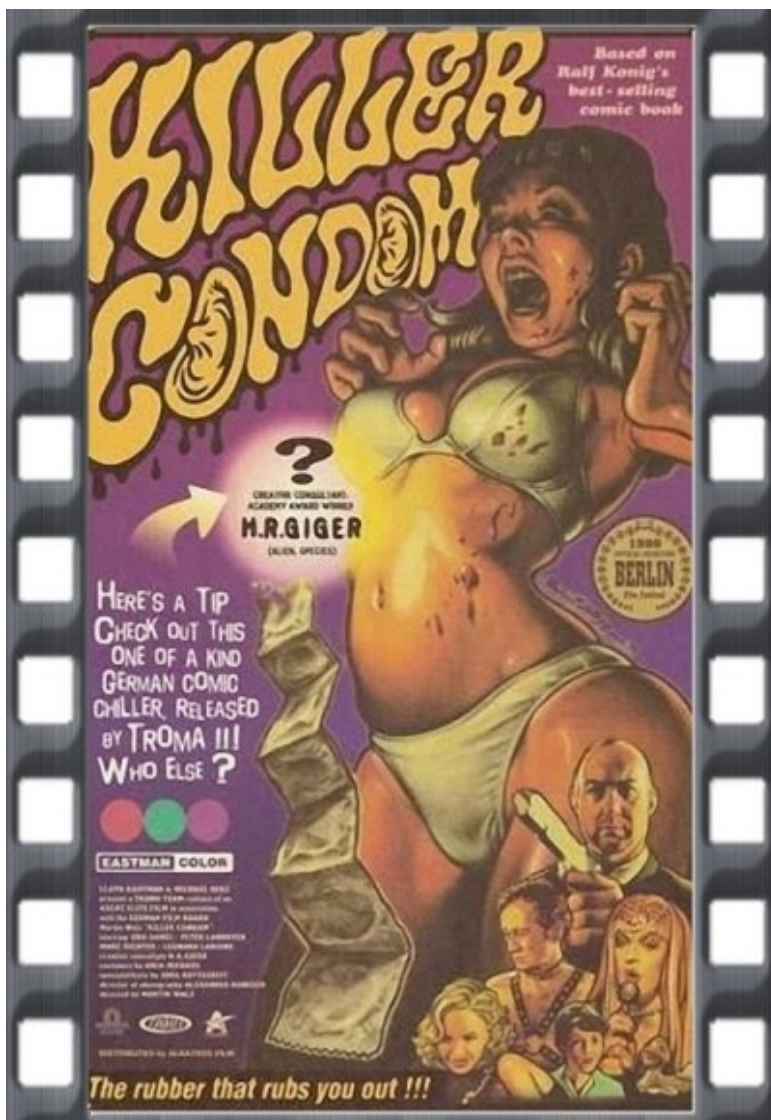
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# SYNERGY

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Synergy Magazine reviews DVDs from all regions. The **R** description with each title advises the Region.

- 1 = USA
- 2 = UK
- 3 = Asia
- 4 = Australia
- 0 = All region.

### **DVD-R**

DVD-R refers to titles which have not been formally released on DVD but release via specialty DVD firms. NTSC or PAL is used with the ALL REGION CODE and refers to the TV format.

### **Blu Ray**

We review Blu Rays from all regions; we will clearly list the region (or region free) on each disc.

The best reference site for Blu Ray is <http://www.blu-ray.com>. It includes lots of details about Blu Ray releases and is one of the only reliable sources for information on which Blu Ray releases are ALL REGION.

If you require an ALL region DVD and Blu-ray player, we recommend you look at the Kogan Blu-ray player (<http://www.kogan.com.au>)

For Adult titles, we include an extra reference **(E)** for explicit, **(M)** for mature. Adult content within mainstream titles will be mentioned as appropriate.

### **Publication Details**

#### **Print and Digital Editions**

Six issues a year.

#### **Online**

Daily Updates

#### **Website**

<http://www.synergy-magazine.com>

The print and digital edition of Synergy is published six times a year and includes reviews from the website from the preceding period expanded content, articles and features research, news, added images, screen shorts and competitions.

Features, articles, news and competitions only appear in the digital and print editions.

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Welcome to the world of Schlock.. But what is schlock ?

It is rather difficult to define, it covers everything from deliberately bad cult films to movies which are simply "so bad they're good". It also covers movies which are so utterly terrible that they keep your eyes nailed to the screen though you wish you could look away. Some filmmakers work hard to make schlock films while others seem to do so without trying and probably would be insulted if you placed them in the category.

In this issue we cover a range of schlock directors from John Waters to Roger Corman, from Ed Wood who surely made the very worst films ever seen to the world of Troma who turned Schlock into an artform with Toxic Avenger and who can forget Poultrygeist !

We also look at Christopher Mihm who makes Fifties homage films which are so damn schlock they are marvelous.

We have included a special review section covering Aussie Schlock. In Australia generous concessions from the government during the Seventies to filmmakers creating a flood of what came to be known as Ozploitation films. So many of these became the mainstay of schlock entertainment worldwide. Today there has even been a bit of revival with such films as *Dying Breed* and *I Know how many runs you scored last Summer*.



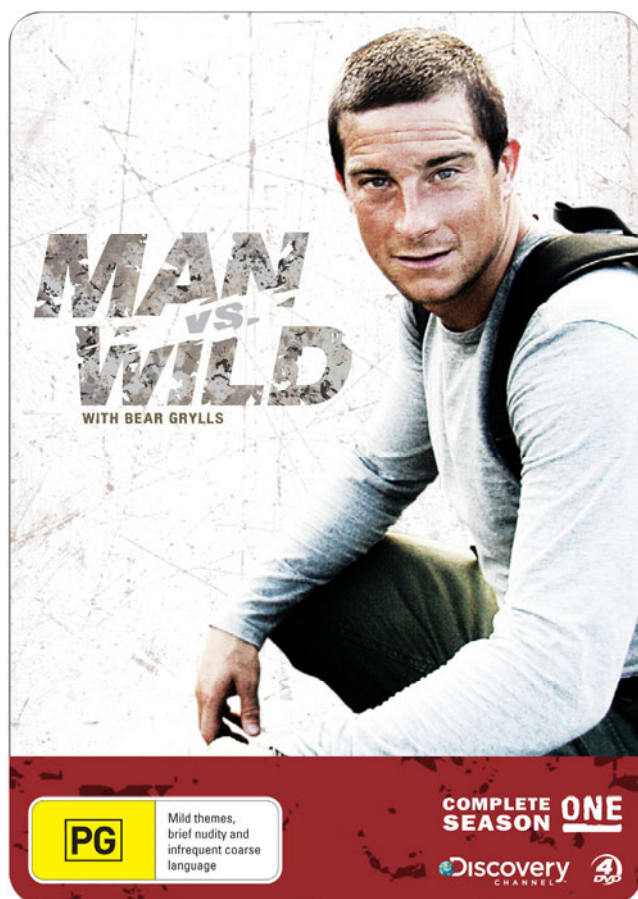
It is surprising to see how many of the old Aussie cult films are being released in new DVD editions from *Alvin Purple* to *Patrick*.

We hope you enjoy this issue which is lots of fun and filled with the more insane end of entertainment. Next issue will be From Anime to Superheroes exploring Anime, Superhero films and lots more.

It will include special features on Alan Moore and Phillip K Dick and should be a fascinating issue.

**Editors  
Synergy**





### Man Vs Wild

Man Vs Wild has become a phenomenon. It is now in its six season. The original first series which started it all off is now available in a limited edition Steelbook edition.

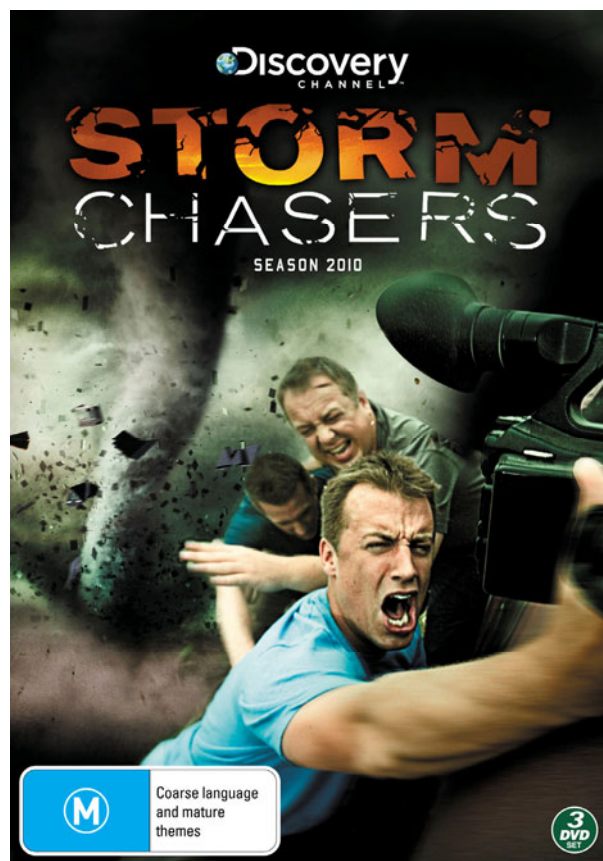
This includes the complete first season of 15 episodes on four DVDs.

Magna Home Entertainment have given us two copies to giveaway and we are pleased to offer them in association with this issue.

If you want a chance to win send an email to [promotions@synergy-magazine.com](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine.com) with Bear Grylls in the subject.

Please include your name and postal address in the body of the email.

This competition is open to Australian residents only.



### Stormchasers:Season 2010

Stormchasers is a series which brings you the latest science in weather and the environment mixed with edge of the seat entertainment. What can be more challenging than chasing storms and Tornadoes which could rip you apart?

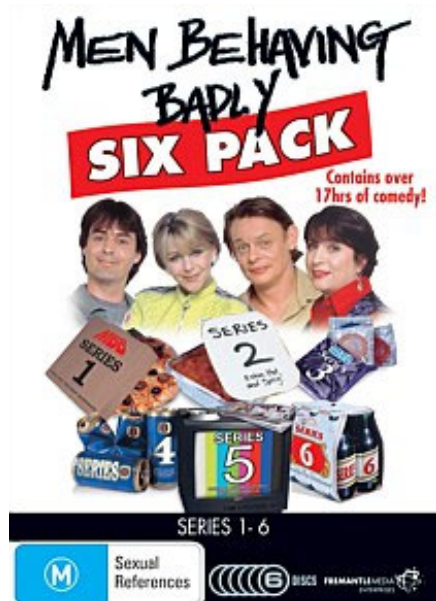
The film stars weather engineer Tim Samara, meteorologist Reed Timmer and filmmaker Sean Casey and is presented in eight episodes over 3 DVDs.

Magna Home Entertainment have given us two copies to giveaway and we are pleased to offer them in association with this issue.

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This competition is open to Australian residents only.



### **Men Behaving Badly Six Pack Roadshow Australia Release 6 DVD Set**

Considering they're fully grown men Gary and Tony behave very badly indeed. It's due to the fact they share a flat and common interest in avoiding anything that involves responsibility. But what would you expect from two flatmates who relish late night beers rambling conversations and the fruitless search for the perfect woman.

Men Behaving Badly displays the sharp dialogue engaging characters and effortless style which make a true comedy classic. Winner of ten awards including BAFTA and RTS.

Roadshow have given us three copies to giveaway and we are pleased to offer them in association with this issue.

If you want a chance to win send an email to [promotions@synergy-magazine.com](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine.com) with SIX PACK in the subject.

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This competition is open to Australian residents only.

### **Twist of Cain**

Some years ago we reviewed *Ossessione* by Guillaume Beylard and it showed immense promise. His latest venture is looking for funding and hence we have included details here in our news section. It sounds like an exciting project mixing *Vertigo* and *Seven* into a strange mix of murder and mayhem.

*Twist of Cain* is a movie of fear, a strange thriller, a feature film made by some passionate people who truly love their cinema. A cinema which returns to the story as the most important thing and to the characters and to the iconic images of true moviemaking. At the same time avoiding filmmaking full of superfluous special effects. This is a way of filmmaking inspired by Hitchcock, De Palma, Fulci or Argento in his early days. It is enhanced by the atmosphere of 1980's, synthetic music, colored lighting and baroque sets and features a story which follows character and not the other way round.

### **Synopsis**

A killer rages on Rome. His modus operandi is always the same, the victims: women, are found without the skin of the face, nerves exposed. Eric Champlain, presenter of independent live radio program during the night shift receives (in the style of Clint Eastwood in *"Play Misty for Me"*) various calls of strange or lost people. One evening a woman announces that she knows the killer; she announces that if he recognizes her visit her immediately or tomorrow at the same time, she will call again to give his identity and a file to the police. She adds before hanging up that she can stop him. The next day when she calls back she is murdered and it throws Eric into the infernal whirlwind of murder and mayhem of a film he never expected.

Why not help bring this film to come to fruition ? Visit the below site for background information, a video interview with the filmmaker and more.

<http://fr.ulule.com/long-metrag-twist-of-cain/>





Iron Sky, the Finnish-German-Australian dark sci-fi comedy, has released a new teaser titled "We Come In Peace!" The teaser also reveals the film's release date: April 4th 2012. Iron Sky has been in production for five years and during that time it has done pioneering work on collaborating with the audience on content creation, publicity and funding the film.

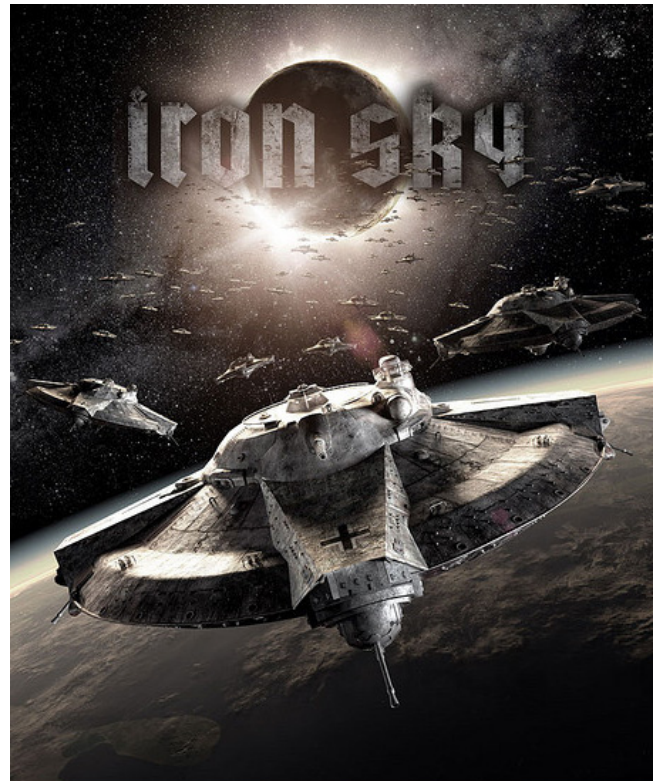
Iron Sky completed principal photography in Germany and Australia this winter. Unlike the first two CGI-heavy teasers, the third teaser gives audiences a glimpse of the live action, actors and dialogue.

The teaser can be seen online here:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNDaOFQ6g2I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNDaOFQ6g2I)

"Iron Sky has been a huge undertaking, and I'm happy that we have wrapped it - and I think the end result is excellent", said the director of Iron Sky, Timo Vuorensola. "Our adventures with Iron Sky have taken us from Finland through Germany to Australia, and back - and we've had a blast. We are still facing a long and interesting post production process with the visual effects, music and sound, but I can already toast the whole crew and our internet audience for one hell of a job they've done!"

"It's finally becoming real. I can't wait for next April to get it out there for our fans," said the producer of Iron Sky, Tero Kaukomaa of Blind Spot Pictures. "It's also very nice to get the new teaser out with live action, and to continue the very successful crowd investing scheme launched at Cannes last year. That initiative is on the brink of reaching half a million euros, which makes it a major success."



Iron Sky is currently in post production and the first rounds of editing are finished. Energia Productions, the company behind the visual effects of the film, are busy crunching together the space battles, computer generated sets and other CGI effects in Tampere, Finland.

The creators of Iron Sky are presenting a new promo at this year's Cannes Film Festival. Come and visit us in the Grand Hotel - it's time for the distributors to make the reich move now: <http://www.blindspot.fi/cannes2011/> Sold territories: Australia & New Zealand (Hoyts),

Benelux (Splendid), China (E-Stars), Czech Republic & Slovakia (Filmpark), Former Yugoslavia (Discovery Film), Finland (Buena Vista), German-speaking Europe (Splendid), Norway (Euforia), Poland (Kino Swiat), Romania (Programs4Media), Taiwan (Serenity Entertainment), and Thailand (Noori Pictures). Stealth Media Group is handling the World Sales.

**House of Ghosts**  
**Currently in pre-production!**

**Synopsis**

With "House of Ghosts," his first supernatural thriller, writer/director Christopher R. Mihm pays tribute to the works of the master of classic horror, William Castle!

Rich socialites Isaac and Leigh have a tradition of throwing exclusive dinner parties that include unique (and expensive) forms of entertainment.

This time, they've booked a spiritual medium who promises to "open a portal to the great beyond" and allow the couple's equally eccentric guests to contact the "afterworld." But, before he begins his presentation, the occultist offers a warning: once the door has been opened, no human being can anticipate or control what might come through.

Regardless, the group collectively agrees to go forward, only to find itself greatly disappointed by the results... at first.

Trapped in the couple's oversized house by a massive winter storm, the partygoers begin to experience unexplainable and increasingly frightening things.

As these occurrences intensify, it becomes apparent that something evil is at work.

Can the group survive the night or will ignoring the medium's warning be the last thing they ever do?

Written, directed and edited by Christopher R. Mihm



Produced by Christopher R. Mihm and Stephanie Mihm

Reference:

[www.sainteuphoria.com/newsletter/jul11.html](http://www.sainteuphoria.com/newsletter/jul11.html)



**The Wicker Tree**

Since 1973 The Wicker Man has proven itself as one of the more unusual cult films. A truly pagan celebration it has shocked and amused audiences throughout the years. At last a sequel is being made by Brian Hardy, the original director. It is sure to be a hit with fans.

Web: <http://thewickertreemovie.com>







John Waters (born April 22, 1946) is an American filmmaker, actor and writer who continues to shock and entertain the American public with his taboo breaking films. Many believe him to be the foundation of underground and transgressive cinema in America.

His work began with underground films in the 1960s with such titles as *Hag in a Black Leather Jacket*, *Eat your Make Up* and *The Diane Linkletter Story*, all of which are presently unavailable. Even at this early stage Waters had begun to assemble a team of “degenerate” actors which came to be known as “Dreamlanders”. These included Divine (Glenn Milstead), David Lochary, Mary Vivian Pearce and Edith Massey. All of his early films were shot in the Baltimore area and he revelled in using his local community as a background for his debauchery.



***Divine in Multiple Maniacs***

*Eat Your Makeup* had many of the themes that Waters would continue to explore throughout his films. Deliberately tasteless and potentially offensive, it included a re-enactment of the Kennedy assassination featuring drag queen Divine as Jackie Kennedy. It was also a sustained attack on consumerism and middle class values featuring a lead character who kidnaps young models and forces them to eat their make-up while modelling themselves to death.

*The Diane Linkletter Story* has never been released. It was a social commentary on the suicide of Art Linkletter's daughter and the way her death was exploited by the media and her family for their own anti-drug crusade. It was made the same day she died and hence a bit too close for comfort.

None of his early films reached a large audience; however, *Mondo Trasho* (1969) and *Multiple Maniacs* (1970) began to get more attention. ***Multiple Maniacs*** embodied Waters unique take on the world with every possible perversion packed into an insane 16 minute short.

The travelling sideshow 'Lady Divine's Cavalcade of Perversions' is actually a front for a group of violent and psychotic kidnappers. Of course, Lady Divine herself is the most vicious of all - but her life changes after she gets raped by a fifteen-foot lobster. The reason behind the



rape and why it is a fifteen-foot lobster we never quite come to understand.

There are lots of superbly blasphemous content including a re-enactment of the Stations of the Cross with a Communion rite using Wonder bread and canned tuna and Divine receiving what can best be described as a rosary-job where she reaches orgasm right in the church pew!

It was in 1972, however, that John Waters really hit the big time with *Pink Flamingos*, a film which shocked a generation and is still banned in many countries including Australia and Canada. Waters describes the film... "*Pink Flamingos was an anti-hippie movie made for hippies who would be punks in two years...*" *Pink Flamingos* was certainly a punk film – it was outrageously anti-establishment, pushed bad taste to the limit and rebelled against anything and everything.

It is hard to describe a more bizarre and unusual plot. The filthiest person alive, Divine, is using the codename Babs Johnson while living in a trailer in the woods with her partner Cotton and mother Eddie. Eddie has a fetish for eggs and spends her days waiting for the "egg man" with



whom she ultimately falls in love. They also live with her mad drug-addled hippie son Crackers who has a perverse fondness for chickens.

On the other side of town live Connie and Raymond Marble who abduct, torture and rape young women and then sell their babies to gay and lesbian couples for a high price. The profits they make are invested in heroin that is then sold at local elementary schools. They hate Divine and are jealous of her filthy lifestyle. Connie and Raymond Marble have their own personal tastes and like to suck each others toes to achieve sexual satisfaction.

They hire Cookie to have sex with Crackers so they can spy on Divine as they are competing with her for the title of "the filthiest people alive". However things go terribly wrong when Crackers wants to bring chickens into the equation. *Pink Flamingos* continues to document the battle for the title of "the filthiest people alive" with everything from shoplifting through the bodily secretion of meat and vegetables, singing arseholes, shit parcels, incest, explicit oral sex, castration and more.

Finally Divine literally eats dog shit to bring the film to its shocking climax. To see Divine follow a poodle around town until it drops a little turd and then scoop it up and swallow it with a grin is true underground cult entertainment ! *Pink Flamingos* was picked up for distribution by the fledgling New Line Cinema and became an instant midnight movie classic.

*Pink Flamingos* was and is Waters most infamous film. It brought him instant notoriety and is still a shockingly taboo-breaking film. Funny, horrible, shocking, offensive, tasteless – all are words that come to mind. For years it only circulated on video until "Criterion" released a high quality laserdisc edition which was followed by a director's cut restored for DVD.



*Pink Flamingos* was followed by *Female Trouble*, which was dedicated to the Manson family and released in 1974. It is set in 1960 Baltimore where Dawn Davenport (played by the plump and beautiful Divine) is living the life of a school brat. She delights in wearing her hair as high as possible and picking fights at school when she is not smoking in the toilets.

As we head into Christmas she is looking forward to the sexy cha-cha heels she has been promised, but it is not to be. Her parents make her sing Christmas hymns and give her a set of "morally uplifting" flatties. Dawn flies into a rage and screams "*fuck you and fuck Christmas*" after shoving her mother into the family Christmas tree !

She runs away from home crying and is picked up by Earl Peterson, a slovenly obese man who drives her to an isolated location for a good time. Dawn becomes pregnant and phones Earl to demand money, who tells her to "*get the hook*" and finally to "*fuck herself*". A rather truer description has never been spoken since divine played both roles !! Watch for the large skid-marks on Earl's undies, priceless !

We now move into the ultimate experience of a dysfunctional family. Dawn is a large go-go dancer, Taffy likes to play car accidents, her two friends are cat burglars and her aunt Ida (Edith Massey) constantly works on her son Gator trying to turn him gay. The last thing she wants is for him to have a wife and children, move to Detroit and work in the auto industry.

The tale gets more and more convoluted as Dawn is hired by Donald and Donna Dasher, who run the local Lipstick Beauty Salon. They believe, like Jean Genet, that crime and beauty are connected and encourage Dawn to start a life of crime. Violence leads to more violence including the kidnapping of Ida, the cutting off of her hand and Ida disfiguring Dawn with acid in retribution.

Dawn now perceives herself as a crime queen and devises a stage act to express her new identity. Her act includes jumping on a trampoline, rolling in a playpen filled with dead fish, shoving them between her legs and throwing them at the audience.

Finally she yells, "*Who wants to be famous.*



### Climactic scene from *Female Trouble*

*Who wants to die for art?*" and commences shooting into the crowd.

*Female Trouble* then offers us a marvellous court drama with the Dashers and Ida pleading innocent and Dawn believing that her upcoming death will make her a cultural icon. As she is placed in the eclectic chair, she gives a final speech as though she has won an Academy Award; finally crime, art and cinema have come together in the life of Dawn Davenport.

*" I'd like to thank all the wonderful people that made this great moment in my life come true. My daughter Taffy, who died in order to further my career. My friends Chicklette and Concetta who should be here with me today. All the fans who died so fashionably and gallantly at my nightclub act. And especially all those wonderful people who were kind enough to read about me in the newspapers and watch me on the television news shows. Without all of you, my career could never have gotten this far. It was you that I burn for and it is you that I will die for! Please remember, I love every fucking one of you! "*

Starting with *Desperate Living* (1977), Waters began casting real-life convicted criminals (Patricia Hearst) as well as well known actors (Sonny Bono, Debbie Harry, Tab Hunter, Traci Lords) in his films. Since Divine was not available he developed what could be best described as a





**The truly voluptuous Jean Hill**

lesbian fairy tale. But this is John Waters, so don't expect it to be politically correct !

The story centers on mentally unbalanced housewife Peggy Gravel and her obese maid Grizelda (Jean Hill). After Grizelda murders Peggy's husband in a fit of rage by sitting on his face and suffocating him, the two women seek refuge in the town of Mortville. Mortville is a sort of mythic or dark fairy tale town which does not exist on any map and is made up of outsiders, criminals and sexual deviants who've fled the normal world.

They move in with Mole McHenry, a very butch dyke who wants a sex change and her lover Muffy St.Jacques (played by aging burlesque star Liz Renay). Sadly Mortville is not a fairytale kingdom. It is ruled by an evil queen named Carlotta who loves to abuse her citizens, including regularly spanking young male members of the populace. Princess Coo-Coo is working with



**Edith Massey as Queen Carlotta**



**Divine & Tab Hunter in Polyester**

the Queen to poison the town's population to keep them in submission, but soon a revolution is underfoot and Carlotta ends up being the dish served at the town's revolutionary feast with an apple stuffed in her mouth.

While *Desperate Living* is not one of the most appreciated Water's films, Divine being notable by her absence. It actually has a lot going for it, including some new actors such as Liz Renay and Jean Hill who inject a different sort of vitality into the Dreamlanders team.

There are some truly outrageous scenes including the suffocation of Peggy's husband between Grizelda's truly humongous legs, the woman's sex "beat" where breasts are struck through holes in the wall and a forced sex change !

Edith Massey as Queen Carlotta is just plain adorable.

*Polyester*, made in 1981, actually moved Waters into the mainstream – well, a little. It was the first Waters film with a medium budget and was actually marketed to a fairly wide audience. It was also produced in Odorama. On entry to the cinema you receive a card which included a selection of smells from the movie, from the nice to very awful. It was a gimmick which made the film truly original

Francine Fishpaw is an average overweight housewife living in a suburban house with her family. (played superbly by Divine in all her 300lb glory). She tries to be a good mother and wife and keep peace with her neighbours but her family is a nightmare. Her husband Elmer, runs a porno theatre and there are regular anti -





**The Battlelines are drawn in Hairspray**

porn protests in front of the theatre and their home. Her son Dexter is a druggie and has a foot fetish which involves violently stamping on woman's feet. (unknown to Francine he is "The Baltimore Stomper" wanted by police). Lulu, her daughter, loves "aggro punks" and is seeing Bobo, the local bad boy who has got her pregnant and now she needs an abortion.

Her best friend is Cuddles (played by Edith Massey) who is a gentle if not a little simple soul. Cuddles has inherited big bucks and is planning the debutante ball she never had when she was younger. Francine would love to attend but she finds Elmer is having an affair so hits the bottle big time. Luckily however, she meets a new man, Todd Tomorrow, owner of Baltimore's finest art-house drive-in cinema and begins an affair of her own. But will she find happiness ?

*Polyester* began John Water's experiment with more mainstream, though always somewhat subversive cinema, which continued with the musicals *Hairspray* and *Cry Baby*.

*Hairspray*, made in 1988, was a rave success reaching a much wider audience than ever before with the John Waters style but this time in a very subtle manner. For god's sake it even got a PG rating ! *Hairspray* went on to be turned into a stage musical which won eight Tony Awards in 2003 including Best Musical!

In 2008 it was adapted into a new film with John Travolta taking the role of Edna Turnblad which was originally played by Divine and other notables such as Queen Latifah and Zac Efron. This was a surprising success and brought *Hairspray* to a whole new audience. Personally I did not like it as much as the original, however, it certainly came pretty close and the new songs



**Johnny Depp & Traci Lords from Cry Baby**

(written for the musical) certainly embodied the "John Waters" spirit.

*Hairspray* is a musical comedy about racial integration and is the most loved of all of John Waters films. It is still watched by people of all ages who are routinely horrified when they see other Waters films. Tracy Turnblad (Ricki Lake) is an overweight "hair hopper" who dreams of being a dancer on the Corny Collins Show, which was based on the The Buddy Deane Show, a real-life Baltimore music program. When her dreams come true and she finds herself battling it out for the coveted Miss Auto Show title, there are greater issues at stake. In Baltimore, blacks and whites are strictly segregated and the only time they are seen on The Corny Collins Show is at Negro day. The time for revolution is at hand !

*Hairspray* also starred Sonny Bono, Debbie Harry, Jerry Stiller, Pia Zadora and Ric Ocasek from The Cars and kick-started the career of Ricki Lake.

By the time of *Cry Baby* in 1990 Divine had passed away, so Waters looked for new ways to express his message. Since *Hairspray* had been such a success he had a large budget and decided to make another musical. He was able to hire quite an amazing array of stars including Johnny Depp, Amy Locane, Susan Tyrrell, Polly Bergen, Iggy Pop, Ricki Lake, Traci Lords, Joe Dallesandro, Kim McGuire and Stephen Mailer. It is really like a fifties teen idol movie with "Cry Baby" as an Elvis lookalike.

Wade "Cry Baby" Walker is a sensitive teen who lives by his own code with his strange and unusual family. The Drapes are a wild family

which loves to drink, party hard and drive very fast cars. The gang includes his hugely pregnant sister Pepper (who already has two kids), her boyfriend Milton, their friend Hatchet-Face (who is so ugly she is a truly beauty) and sex addict Wanda (played by sex addict and porn star Traci Lords). They live at Turkey Point, a woodland camp run by Grandma and Grandpa (Susan Tyrrell and Iggy Pop). Cry-Baby fronts a band which is made up of the Drape family.

He has a love interest in Allison, however, there is a problem; she is a Square. And Drapes and Squares do not mix, especially since Allison attends a grooming school and is being courted by all the good boys. When Allison decides to "go bad" and mix with the Drapes, the battle lines are drawn and a strange and wonderful musical begins. When Cry Baby was released by Imagine films it was marketed as a teen film and a lot was cut to edit it down for a general release. The director's cut restores quite a bit of the original footage.

Kathleen Turner starred in the quirky 1994 John Waters film *Serial Mum*. Life seems to be normal in this middle class neighbourhood, however, many of the woman in the street are receiving obscene phone calls, very obscene calls. Soon we realize that the pure, innocent wife and mother is not only making the calls but killing off those who stand in her way. Kathleen Turner as Beverly Sutphin, the beautiful yet murderous middle class serial killer is superb embodying the true mood of the obsessive and the strangely disturbed. *Serial Mum* brings to the audience Waters interest in serial killers, murderers and crime which would be again explored in his narration of the 2008 series "Til



**Kathleen Turner as Beverly Sutphin—devoted mother and killer.**

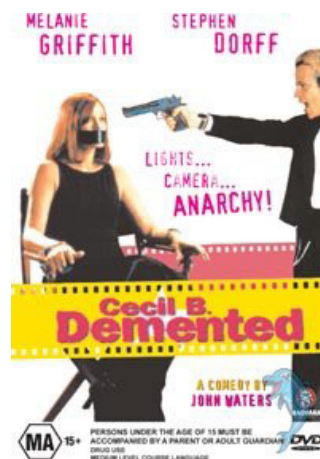


**Stephen Dorff and Alicia Witt in Cecil B Demented**

*Death do Us Part* which explored marriages which end in murder.

*Pecker*, Waters 1998 exploration of the life of an independent photographer starred Edward Furlong and Christina Ricci. It is very approachable and many believed Waters had gone a bit soft. It still has quirky characters, unusual crazes (tea bagging is a rather nice touch) and an excellent plot, but does lack the bite of a lot of Waters earlier films.

*Cecil B Demented* which dates from 2000 was a real return to form for Waters. In many ways it went right back to his earliest films. Just as in *Eat Your Make Up* models were kidnapped and forced to model, in *Cecil B Demented* actors are kidnapped by a group of radical cinema terrorists. Certainly a politically incorrect subject!



Stephen Dorff is Cecil B Demented (a pun on Cecil B. DeMille) who has formed a movement to transform Hollywood. At its centre is a cell of filmmaking terrorists – the Sprocket Holes. They are true revolutionaries having their favourite director's names tattooed on their arms and taking vows of celibacy for cinema!

They decide to kidnap Honey Whitlock, a fairly vacuous superstar played by Melanie Griffith



with the intent to force her to act in an underground film, *Raving Beauties*. *Raving Beauties* is to be a spontaneous docudrama indicting Hollywood, corporate movie making, censorship and family entertainment. Honey is slowly “brainwashed” to follow the radical line and star in the film. This is especially amusing since the film stars Patty Hearst who was “conditioned” by the radical SLA to be an urban terrorist ! Art certainly imitates life in this John Waters film.

It is as though Waters realised he needed to return to his more radical roots and hence *Cecil B Demented* is extremely violent, perverse and outrageous. It is also filled with music, its score offers rap, punk and even some Liberace.

Looking back from 2004 at John Waters’ career you begin to wonder what he could do next. Divine, Edith Massey and so many of the Dreamlanders were dead and others were certainly past their prime. He had pushed many boundaries and even moved into musicals and the mainstream. As Waters watched the development of the right wing throughout the US and the world and the way in which censorship went hand in hand with repression, he decided to make the ultimate sex comedy !

While certainly a major risk for any studio, it just shows how much industry significance he has developed in that he was able to get such a controversial film made.

*A Dirty Shame* was a real shock to those who were used to Waters more “middle of the road” humour and were not aware of his earlier films such as *Pink Flamingos*. Starring a new team including Tracey Ullman, Johnny Knoxville, Sel-



### Sex Messiah Johnny Knoxville

ma Blair, Chris Isaak and Suzanne Shepherd as well as a few old Dreamlanders such as Mink Stole Waters created a tale of religion, spirituality, sex, repression and fetish – what a combination.



The plot is based on a rare medical condition where an injury to the head can lead to sex addiction. While some see this sex addiction as an illness, others such as Johnny Knoxville believe it is a religious calling. He is the messiah of sex and calls disciples to him to explore all manner of sexual excess. He is blessed with a very special long tongue and can stimulate orgasms by with a simple touch.

Knoxville is the leader of a strange sex movement which is searching for the ultimate sex act



### Bears, Cubs and Otters in A Dirty Shame



### Tracey Ullman after she had seen the light with her daughter “Udders” (Selma Blair)



to bring about a global orgasm. Together they explore every possible sexual fetish (and I mean every) from infantilism to bears, BDSM to transvestism, to be honest the well known fetishes look run-of-the-mill in this film ! As long as it is consensual, they will do it.

Tracey Ullman has been trying to keep her daughter, Udders (Selma Blair with huge breasts) away from the radical sex mission until she too receives a head injury and sees the light. Soon Ullman is visiting an old people's home and doing the hokey pokey picking up water bottles with her vagina. A scene which will not be quickly forgotten.

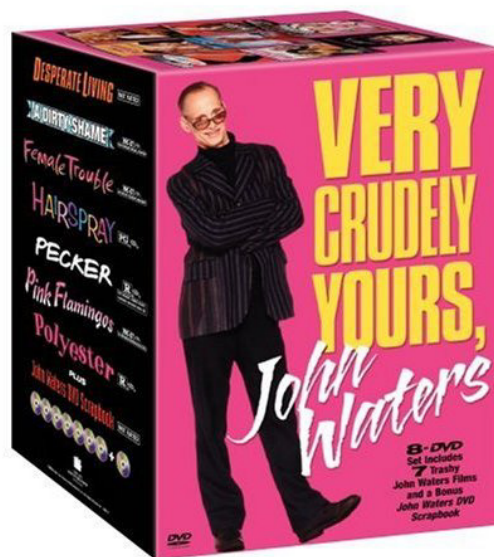
Now the sex missionaries must wage war against "The Neuters" a group of right wingers who hate sex.

It is hard to describe **A Dirty Shame** except that it explores every possible sexual variation to create a very sex positive vision of life. It is packed with a horny jazz soundtrack, lots of filthy jokes, nudity and lots more.

Above all it is a lot of fun, while many John Waters films pushed boundaries in ways which seemed shocking even offensive, this film does it all in a fun and amusing way. If you are opened minded you will adore **A Dirty Shame**.

At the same time, as one may expect, the censors hated it. Even in the US where you can release nearly anything on DVD this received a NC 17 rating (the equivalent to an Aussie R) which locked it out of many markets including stores such as Walmart.

In the end Waters also released a more restrained edition for general release. In Australia it was released uncut as an R Rated film. There



is also a seriously cool score available on CD.

One really never knows what is hidden deep in Waters' psyche and considering that for some forty years he has been challenging, shocking and entertaining us, I am sure there is a lot more to come yet.



The films of John Water's are available in various editions, Pink Flamingos is still banned in Australia and currently Desperate Living has only been released on Video in Region 4.

The best way to purchase John Waters titles is from US sellers such as Deep Discount or Amazon.

An especially nice edition is **The John Waters Collection Very Crudely Yours** released in the US which includes A Dirty Shame NC-17 Version, Desperate Living, Female Trouble, Hair-spray, Pecker, Pink Flamingos and Polyester.

There are also double DVD sets released in the US which are from the John Waters Collection, for example, John Waters Collection #2 includes both Polyester and Desperate Living.





Lloyd Kaufman was born on December 30th 1945) his early years were uneventful however all that changed when he enrolled at Yale. He majored in Chinese studies with his fellow students being George W Bush and Oliver Stone. Two of his close friends were film fanatics and this gave Kaufman a great love of film. He graduated in 1968, made friends with filmmakers Robert Edelstein and Eric Sherman and spent a year working with the US peacecorps.

*At Yale I was placed in a dormitory room with two film fanatics, and I knew everything had irrevocably changed.*

### **All I Need To Know About Filmmaking I Learned From The Toxic Avenger Lloyd Kaufman**

On his return he began to take his first steps into what would become a lifelong obsession with low budget film. He produced Robert Edelstein's film *Rappaccini* and his own first release, *The Girl Who Returned*. The film was presented at film societies at Yale, Harvard, and other east coast institutions. Kaufman went on to work for Cannon Films, where he met John G. Avildsen they collaborated for several years making low-budget films including *Joe* and *Cry Uncle!*

Kaufman also directed and starred in his second feature film *The Battle of Love's Return*. He was a very busy director also working with Oliver Stone on *Sugar Cookies* and directing *Big Gus*, *What's the Fuss?* What is less known is his role

as locations manager for *Saturday Night Fever* and *2001 Space Odyssey*.

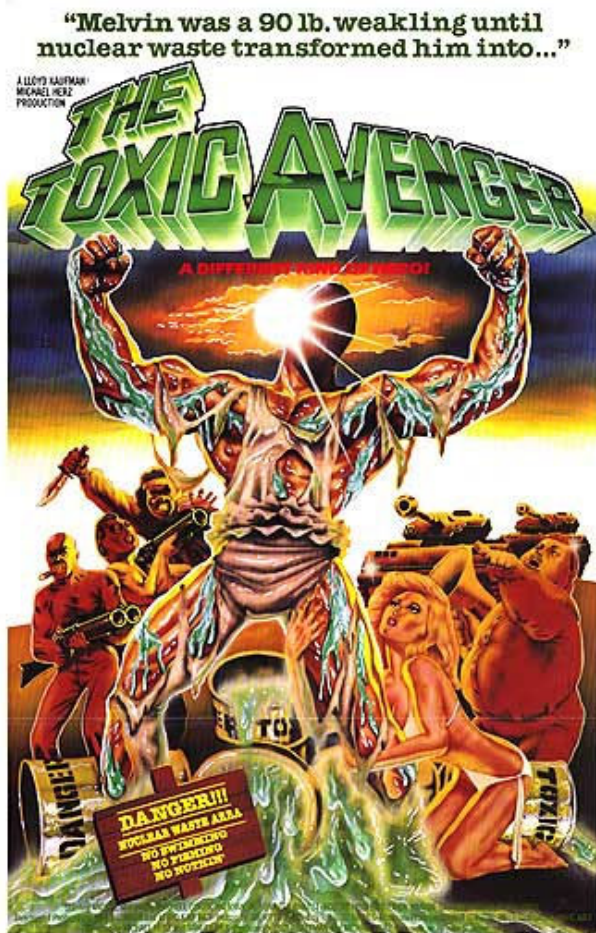
For a short time he also produced a range of adult films such as *The Divine Obsession* and *Sweet and Sour*. He did so under the name "Louis Su".

All of this built up to the founding of Troma Studios in 1974. It was not an easy road. Troma began as a distribution agency for comedies, cult and genre films but certainly was not making much money. Kaufman continued to work in Hollywood to help pay the bills, working on everything from *Rocky* to *The Final Countdown*. Kaufman's stubborn and eccentric personality did not necessarily endear him to the Hollywood types; he was creative and effective yet never towed the line. He vowed never to work for Hollywood again, later in his career it was Hollywood who would come knocking!

The first releases from Troma were such films as *Squeeze Play!*, *Waitress*, *Stuck on You* and *The First Turn On!* They were only moderate successes and today seem to be rather dated light erotic comedies.



Everything changed in 1984. A dark violent and rather anti-social comic book told the story of the Toxic Avenger. It was a strange tale of Melvin, a sad little nerd who works as a cleaner in a local gym populated by sports jokes and obnoxious beauty queens. Melvin is pushed around and abused and finally falls into a vat of radioactive goo. He is burnt, deformed and transformed beyond recognition. He becomes super strong, super-human and very pissed off. Melvin becomes

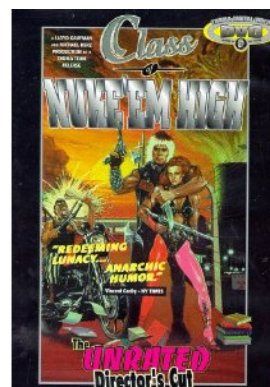


The Toxic Avenger or Toxie to those who love him. *The Toxic Avenger* was incredibly successful it combined the disenfranchised outsider gets revenge motif with an incredible level of comic style violence. The violence caused some problems for Troma and cuts had to be made to release it in some countries. Toxie slicing and dicing criminals, morons and big business stooges is a sight to see and it is still popular today having dated rather well. There were three sequels to the original and an animated



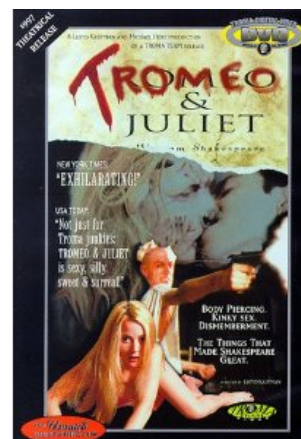
children's cartoon. He is so popular than in 2011 Troma is remaking the original film with the hope of giving Toxie a new lease of life.

The *Class of Nuke 'Em High* was the next major success from Troma. Again the theme is nuclear fallout. This time it is at a local high school where one of the girls gives birth to a mutant who starts eating all the students. Another success, this time combining violence and gore with high school antics, *Nuke 'Em High* spawned two sequels.



Things became more difficult for Troma as censorship laws began to tighten in the late eighties. *Troma's War* (1988) had to have significant cuts to be released and did not do well at the box office. While *Sgt. Kabukiman N.Y.P.D* was amusing, again it never made a dint at the box office either.

*Tromeo and Juliet* (1996) changed Troma's fortunes, at least for a while. Loosely based on Shakespeare, it has a raucous sense of humour and became a major hit, earning the grand prize at the Fanta Festival in Rome.





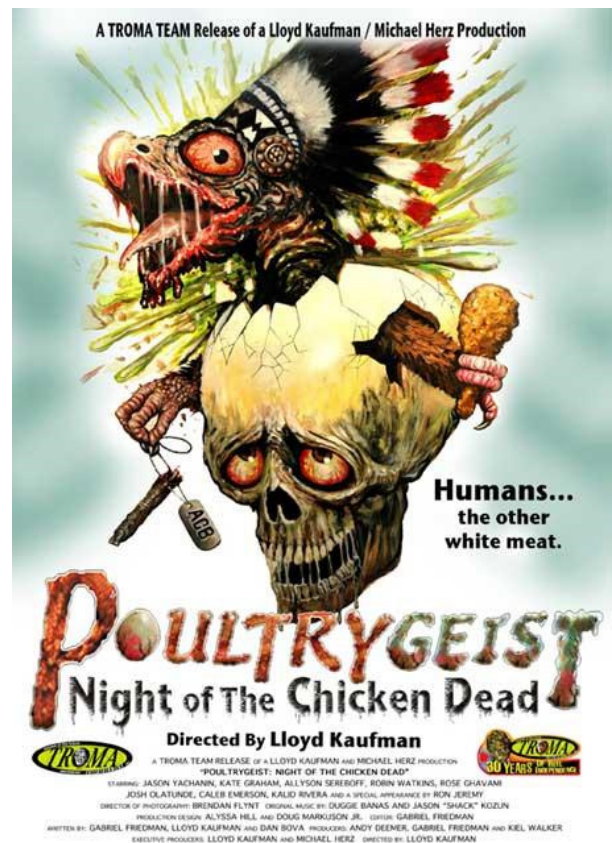


Troma release a number of smaller films after *Tromeo and Juliet* including *Terror Firmer* (1999) and *Citizen Toxie: The Toxic Avenger IV*. While these did not achieve box office success they were enjoyed by the growing number of devoted Troma film fans.

A major disaster occurred during the filming of *Tales from the Crapper* which lost Troma some \$250,000 and things became more difficult for a time. Slowly Troma and Kaufman moved from the edge of the cinema industry to the mainstream without losing credibility. With the success of so many genre films Kaufman became a cult celebrity appearing in a vast number of cameos and small roles. In 2003 he received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Fantasy Film Festival of Amsterdam.

*Poultrygeist: Night of the Chicken Dead* (2006) is the latest big release Lloyd Kaufman and Troma. *Poultrygeist* is really the ultimate Troma film, it seems to be the climax of over 30 years of refining humour, biting satire, sex and bodily fluid jokes and gore. It is quite extreme so be warned, it has many scenes which are uniquely perverse. While there are certainly lots of politically-incorrect jokes about ethnicity, sex, gender and religion, the movie offers some surprisingly intelligent dialogue about consumerism, sexism, racism and even animal rights, admittedly in a truly bizarre package.

Arbie (Jason Yachanin), a recent high school grad can't afford to go to college, in his own words his mother is blind and his father is a retard. He is having a good time in the local cemetery with his girl Micki (Allyson Sereboff), when attacked by a strange creature, they escape – but not because Arbie has got hold of its finger from his arse and kept it as a memento. (This is



a good warning that this movie has a lot of backside and defecation humour!). Micki is off to college and promises not to change or lose her love for him, but they drift apart.

Some years later he goes to the opening of the local American Chicken Bunker store. American Chicken Bunker is a powerful conglomerate which has destroyed a local Native American burial ground to build its new premises in Troma-ville. General Lee Roy (Robin Watkins) is the CEO of American Chicken Bunker and is a member of the KKK just like his daddy.

Arbie is shocked to find his girlfriend is now an avowed lesbian and is protesting against American Chicken Bunker, in fury, he launches into



one of the many musical numbers in the movie and then starts to work as ACB as a "counter girl". Other staff include a gay Mexican named Paco Bell (Khalid Rivera), an redneck animal lover (a true "animal lover" ) named Carl Jr. (Caleb Emerson), and a Muslim woman named Humas (Rose Ghavami). The manager, Denny (Joshua Olatunde), is an African American. Of course, these characters allow for every possible joke and comedy situation you can imagine, most made in terribly bad taste. However, for all their potential shock value, they are actually used to ridicule prejudice rather than reinforce it. It is one of things that endears me to Troma, it may seem to offend on the surface, but when you look closely it has a very open and subversive attitude. At the same time, these characters are lots of fun and offer some highly outrageous humour ranging from the chicken scene with Carl Jr and the suicide scene with Humas (see in the extras). There is also lots of lesbian humour and, of course, the required semi nude shots.

As the curse of the Native American Indian Burial Ground takes effect the horror begins and boy, does the horror pack a punch. It begins with the death of various staff including Carl Jrn as he "plucks a chicken" (literally) and Paco as he tries to add "his special sauce" to the chicken mix ! However, death is not the end, they are transformed in to possessed chicken zombies ! This is truly impressive entertainment, with lots of humour, satire, musical numbers, bizarre set pieces, gore, sex, more gore and more sex ! It is really the climax of years of evolution within the Troma studios and is the ultimate Troma extravaganza !

The three DVD special edition package certainly gives the film the attention it deserves.

Disc 1 includes the features and a range of extras accessed via a very fun chicken storefront menu with lots of clucking. There is a excellent audio track from Kaufman and the team, a strange trailer called Lovely Scenes From Bergman's 'Virgin Spring ' and a couple of music videos - Calamari Safari Music Video - Not By New Found Glory and Count Smokula Music Video. There are also Troma previews (six) and some hidden Easter eggs. (These are not too difficult to find)

Disc 2 Poultry In Motion: Truth Is Stranger Than

Chicken is a feature length behind the scenes documentary that is brutally honest about the work that goes into creating an indie low budget film.

Tromahawk Nuggets includes such gems as a clip from the New York City Premiere, Blow Me... Away - Shooting The ACB Explosion Sequence, Recording the Songs on how the music was made and Designing the Monsters on how the special effects were done on a budget. There are also a few other special effects sections and related background information on how the film was developed.

There are four deleted scenes including the original ending planned for the film and the controversial but fun Huma Suicide Song which was cut from the film.

Disc 3 is the Kara-Yolk-E disc. Here you can play some of the songs with lyrics and sing along (I kid you not) The songs included here are Poultrygeist Theme Song, Revenge Is A Dish Best Served Fried, Fast Food Love, Generous General, Longing To Live - Waiting To Die, and Suicide. There are also some further trailers.

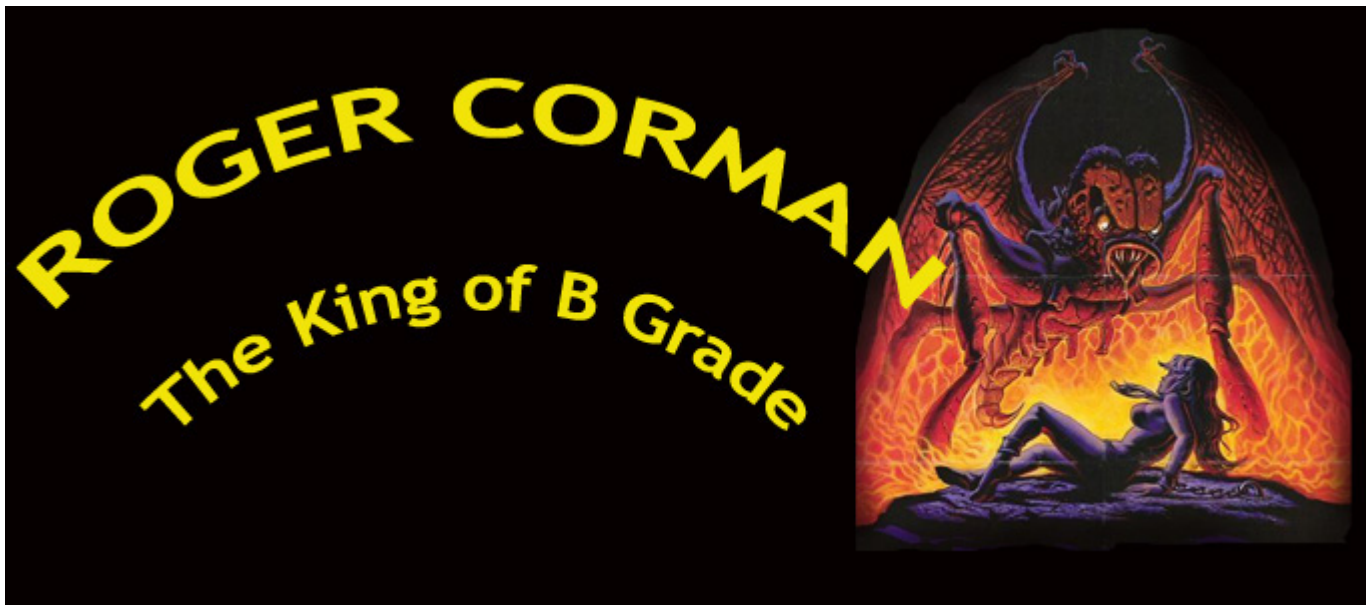
What you notice from Poultrygeist is something which Troma brought to the industry more than any other firm, the cult of the extra. Every Troma disc is packed with a ridiculous array of extras, not just deleted scenes and some screen shorts, but guides through Troma Studios to an introduction to the Troma Dance shows. Troma DVD's have always been packed to the brim with content which makes them extraordinarily good value for money.

*There would be no Tarantinos without the shock-sploitation satires of the iconoclastic Kaufman, which can often give more critical insight about the world than some grand Hollywood epics.*

**Robert Dasonowsky**  
**Director of Film Studies – University of**  
**Colorado**  
**Colorado Springs**

So what's next ? Toxic Avenger is being re-made, Father's Day is being filmed and the script for The Toxic Avenger 5: Toxic Twins is under development. With the sort of madness Troma embodies I see lots of strange and wonderful films yet !





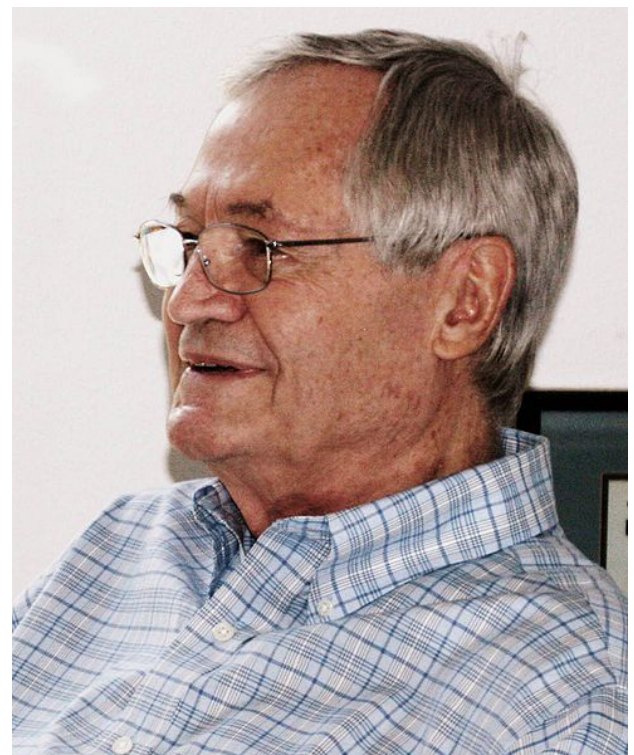
**Schlock** : (n) *Slang term for something of cheap or inferior quality; junk.*

In film terms schlock is used to designate B-grade, lower quality or cheaply produced films which often have obvious flaws. This never seems to have worried Roger Corman who has made his reputation on this type of film. It's not that he can't make a good film, unlike Ed Wood, but he just seems to do best producing quick, cheap films. He has perfected the art and has earned his title of "King of the B-Movies".

In the period after World War II the big film companies had amalgamated and were producing and distributing their own films, often showing them only in their own theatres. It was hard to find a niche market for a small independent producer to exploit. In 1949 or 1950 the U.S. Government ended this cosy arrangement and required the studios to dismantle their monopolies and divest themselves of their theatres. Suddenly the market for independent producers widened dramatically. It is about this period that Corman made his first films.

A further change was the wide introduction of independent drive-in theatres. Corman's budget films were ideally suited for the late night shows that allowed the drive-in owners to get more screening time for their investment. Theatres and drive-ins would put a couple of black and white science fiction films onto a single bill to get "bums on seats" during the quiet periods.

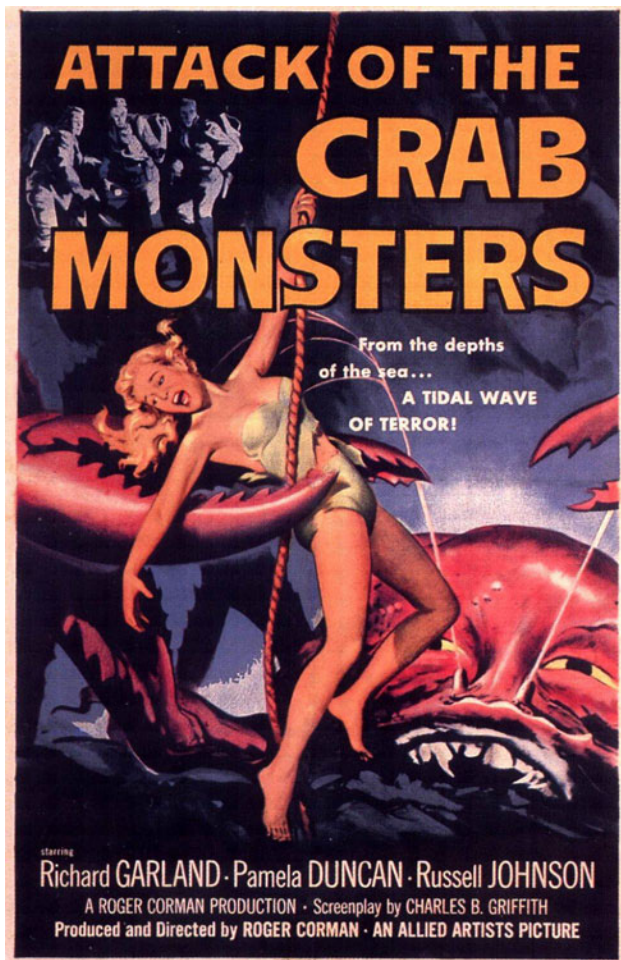
This created a voracious market for a producer who could produce films quickly and cheaply. Corman discusses his early career and the problems of being an independent producer in



an interview on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ED9FGOLRsXw>

The early films were cheap exploitation flicks reflecting current themes in film. Thus his first films reflected the monster films that were so popular at the time, *Monster From The Ocean Floor* (1954), *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957) and *The Wasp Woman* (1959).

In the best traditions of the pulp SF genre, the film posters featured well-built but scantily-clad young ladies in the clutches of some inhuman monster that has set out to destroy civilisation. In many ways these were American equivalents



of the series of films featuring Godzilla and other monsters that regularly threatened Tokyo. People seemed to love being scared and Corman met that demand. His second film, *The Fast and the Furious* (1955), was a drama involving a prison escapee who hijacks a car and a beautiful woman who joins him in a race across the U.S. to reach Mexico and freedom. It had lots of high speed driving and crashes. Plot and film quality were less important to audiences than being scared. It must be said, though, that classic films like *Creature From The Black Lagoon* (1954) were little better than schlock themselves. They still featured men in fake-looking rubber suits menacing attractive women. Corman's films by comparison had a few minor errors but were otherwise similar. They were sometimes a bit over the top with their action and a bit under-scripted, but these were the same characteristics that got the early Australian and New Zealand film industries started.

An initial problem was finding the capital to make a film. Usually films were paid for on completion, which gave the producer the funding for his next film. After his first few successful films

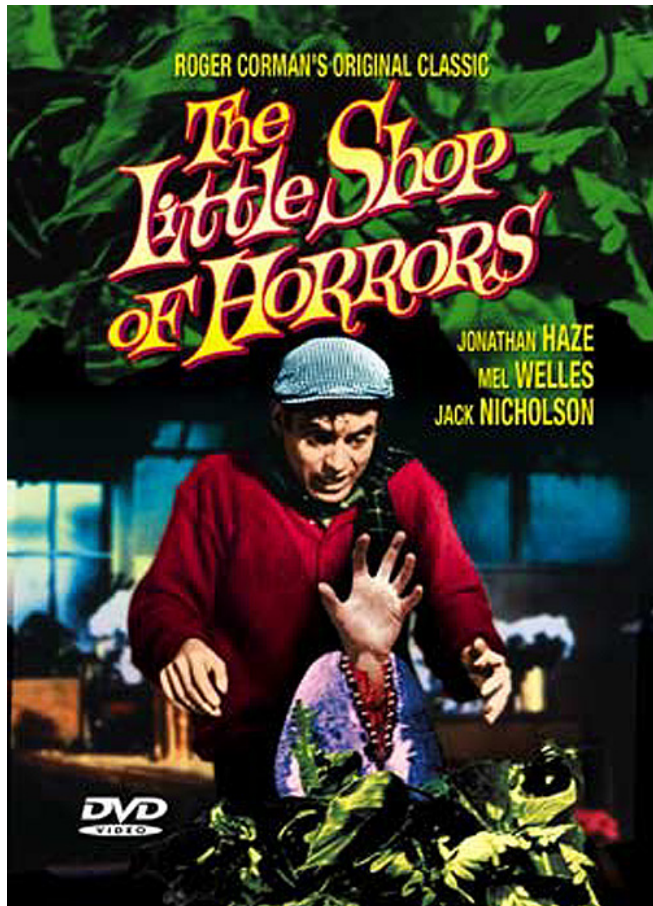


Corman asked for an advance against his next one and got it. He was also funded to make some of his early films in colour.

Corman developed a reputation for squeezing every cent of value out of staff, sets and actors. With a budget of around \$50,000 per film he could not afford too many retakes. He demanded speed above all. This was in contrast to the rather lazy way that the studio films were made, with their search for higher quality and spectacle, such as William Wyler's and Cecil B de Mille's work. The spectaculars may have been more impressive and made more money but Corman could turn out more "B" films in the same period. His films were affordable for small theatre owners. The low cost came with penalties, though. One was the need to put up with minor continuity errors and simple plots that covered the most action in the smallest number of sets. In *War of the Satellites*, hidden among the dodgy models, you can see a thumb in one spaceship docking scene.

In a later interview he summed up his attitude to budgets. He stated his admiration for *The Blair Witch Project* and explained "they understood what their budget was and they wrote the script

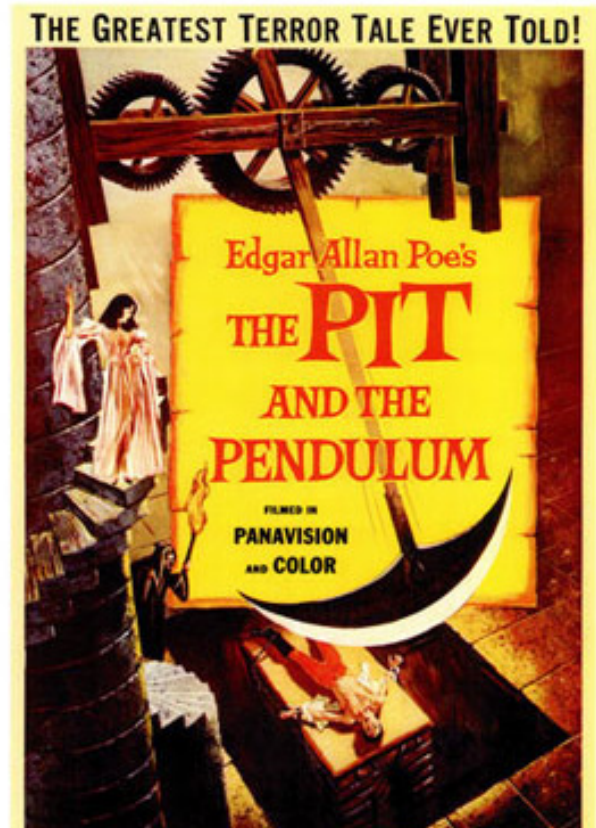




and made their picture to do the best possible job they could on that budget.”

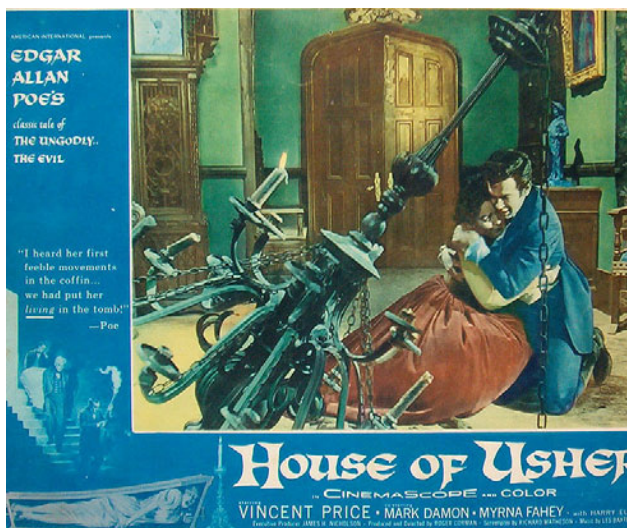
**Andrew J. Rausch**  
*Love of Film: Directors on Movies.*

Another penalty was that scripts were written with speed of production in mind and that speed put pressure on actors, writers and production crew. Charles Griffith, the screenplay writer for *Little Shop of Horrors* (1960), later said that Corman used half his genius to degrade his own



work, and the rest to degrade the artists who worked for him. *Little Shop of Horrors* was shot in only two days and a night. Griffith's comment is supported by Corman's tremendous output – up to seven films a year. It must be hard to maintain quality with this sort of pressure but it could be done – Hammer in Britain managed quite successfully. Hammer, however, had a range of directors and support staff permanently available to them so the actors, writers and crew were under less pressure.

The sets were recycled again and again. They had a wide range of suitable scenery for the







expensive outside shots. Those actors and staff who could stand Corman's pace often went on to greater careers, like Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Peter Bogdanovich and William Shatner.

Corman first came to mass attention in the 1960s with a series of films based on the horror stories of Edgar Allen Poe: *House of Usher* (1960), *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), *The Premature Burial* (1962), *Tales of Terror* (1962),



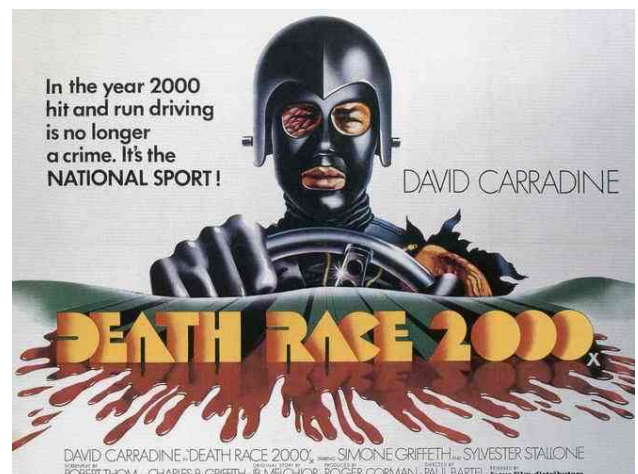
*The Raven* (1963), *The Haunted Palace* (1963), *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964) and *The Tomb of Ligeia* (1964). He had a good working relationship with Vincent Price who starred in most of these films. His work for all its minor defects repopularised the horror genre based on classic tales.

After *The Raven* completed filming Corman is reported to have had some days left before the sets were scrapped. He used that period to hurriedly make *The Terror* (1963). As well as recycling the sets he also used *The Raven's* cast and crew. He may have had ideas of moving more into mainstream films with these classic adaptations.

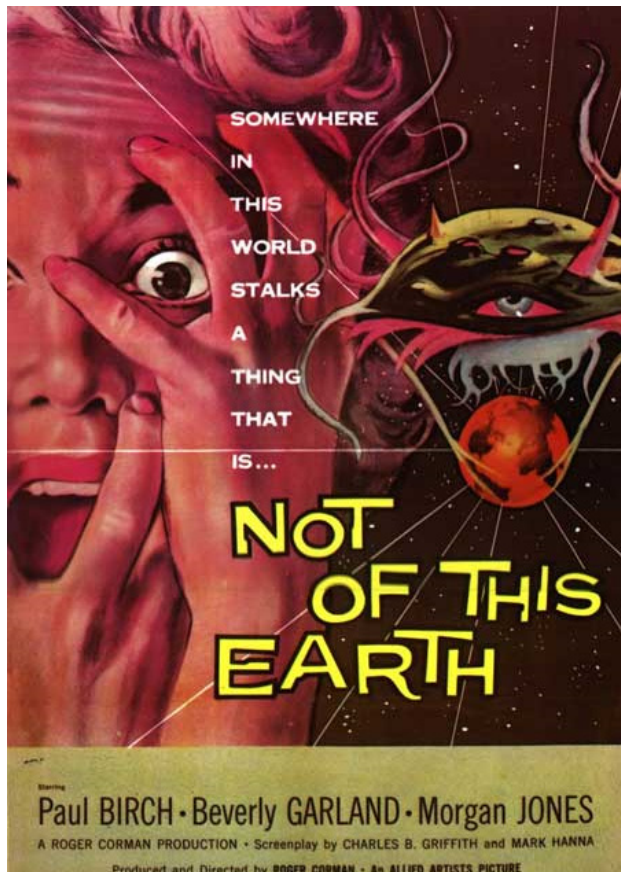
In the 1960s he also made the only film on which he lost money, *The Intruder*. The film was on desegregation of schools and the U.S. public wasn't ready for this just yet so Corman moved back to the style of film that his audiences loved.

Corman started New World Pictures in 1970 to produce and distribute his own films as well as those of other small producers. He branched out into other genres like *Death Race 2000* (1975), *Galaxy of Terror* (1981), and *Children of the Corn* (1983). New World also distributed Joe Dante's *Piranha* (1978), itself a piece of schlock to rival Corman's best work with its humming fish, frothing water and bikini-clad girls.

Corman did not miss the popularity of biker films, either. *The Wild Angels* (1966) starred a young Henry Fonda and Nancy Sinatra and practically defined the outlaw biker genre. He followed up in 1967 with the co-productions

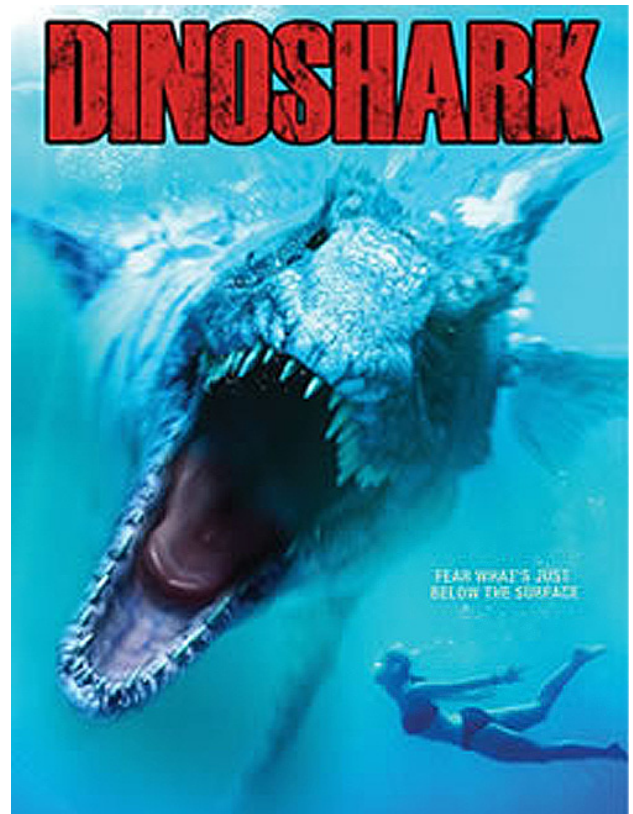






*Devil's Angels* and *Born Losers*. *Born Losers* was mostly produced and directed by Tom Laughlin as Corman was himself making two other films at the time. As a result Laughlin produced a somewhat better-the-average film but still within Corman's ruthless budget. Corman retired from directing his films in 1971 to concentrate on producing them instead.

He recycled one of his own films in a 1988 remake of his 1957 *Not Of This Earth*, about space-going vampires. Despite the somewhat more generous budget the remake offered nothing really new apart from the first legit appear-



ance of ex-porn star Traci Lords. Jim Wynorski got the job of directing the remake. He was a good choice by Corman, as he had something of a background in schlock. He kept the rather silly plot of the original, added a campy feel, and gave Miss Lords the chance to prove she could act – and somewhat to peoples' surprise, she could. Sort of.

Corman's most recent work has gone back to his SF roots in monster films. *Dinoshark*, *Sharktopus* and *Dinocroc versus Supergator* were all produced in 2010. They are pure schlock in the best Corman traditions but, also in his best traditions, they are well made and a lot of fun to watch.

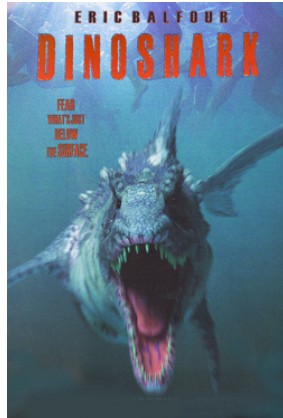


*Corman's World: Exploits of a Hollywood Rebel* is a documentary by Alex Stapleton covering Corman's remarkable career. With over 300 films under his belt it is a fitting tribute to Corman's work. He may be "The King of B-Grade" but a lot of people have seen his films and enjoyed them.

**Dinoshark**  
**Anchor Bay**  
**Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

Jaws has a lot to answer for. Since that film sharks have become cold merciless killers of the sea, not cute and cuddly fish just out for a good time. Sure, they may have taken a nibble on the odd surfer but that was probably just to see if they were edible. Probably. Now Roger and Julie Corman have given us another take on sharks. Recently we looked at their shark film, Sharktopus, as an example of Corman's shameless B-movie style. With Dinoshark he has confirmed that. In fact, it borrows so much from Sharktopus that it may as well be a sequel. It is as if Corman has decided to have a second go at Sharktopus and given the monster a new look.

The Dinoshark is a creature from the Jurassic, finally released from the Arctic ice as global warming melts its glacier prison. What it was doing on a glacier instead of in the sea is not explained. Being a bit peckish after thousands of years it dines on a lone yachtsman then heads south to warmer waters. It finds its way to a resort town in Mexico, just like Sharktopus, where there are lots of bikini-clad meals. It may even be the same resort town from Sharktopus, so the locals must be feeling a bit picked on by now. Nevertheless they ignore a sighting by one of the local boaties (and smuggler) who swears that the creature he saw eating people and their



boats was definitely not the tiger shark that the police think it is.

Dinoshark now goes on a killing and feeding rampage, as such monsters do. Corman gives us lots of blood and guts, plenty of bikinis, and a death rate that threatens to depopulate the town. Like Sharktopus the Dinoshark then heads upriver to a tourist resort where it gets a few more snacks. It also eats a police helicopter that it drags from the air. Helicopters are a popular snack food for marine monsters. The boatie and his attractive, briefly-clad girlfriend are hot on the trail when they get a call from the world's only Dinoshark expert who is, naturally, in town at the time. The expert is played by Corman himself. He gives the couple the bad news that Dinoshark has an armoured hide and can only be attacked through the one weak spot in its head, its eye socket.

Now we know how it's going to end, Dinoshark heads back towards the open sea. It stops briefly to feed at a marine regatta where an all-girl water polo team is competing, then heads out to sea to meet its fate.

The plot is familiar and predictable. The acting is OK but not great. The effects range from good (underwater shots of the shark) to woeful (it cruises the river at the speed of a motorboat but doesn't leave a ripple). The characters are two-dimensional. But in this genre those are not necessarily bad points. It gives us a simple, fast moving film with lots of bikinis and blood that is not going to challenge the mind but is actually very, very funny. Corman simply gives us a film that is great entertainment in his true B-grade style.





# ED

# WOOD



## THE WORST MOVIES

## EVER MADE

Ed Wood was a legendary producer. His films took schlock to new depths of silly plots, bad acting and especially blatant continuity errors. It wasn't so much a lack of budget as his impressive lack of talent that made him a legend. He was also a crossdresser and was rumoured to have taken part in a Pacific Islands attack during World War II while wearing women's underwear. He certainly directed some of his films while dressed as a female.

Wood was born in 1924. As a child he was supposedly often dressed as a little girl – his mother apparently wanted a daughter, not a son. Wood grew up in the fantasy world of pulp fiction, especially Westerns and the occult.



He came to love movies.

He seemed an appropriate choice when producer George Weiss wanted a short exploitation film, *I Changed My Sex*, based on the life of a well known transsexual. It led him to write the classic *Glenn or Glenda*, a study of transsexualism that drew heavily on his own life.

The biggest problem with Wood's films is their rushed quality. His shooting schedules were intense, up to thirty scenes in a day's shooting, when most directors were aiming for one good take per day. To keep up such a tight schedule Wood cut many corners. A scene, no matter what errors it contained, was almost never re-shot. Props and scenery were minimal and cheap. There seemed to be little direction of the actors and actresses and they were left to do their own thing. Stock footage was often cut in and voiceover narration was used to cut the number of scenes that would otherwise be needed to explain the plot.

His films have a strong cult following for these





defects – some films were training movies on “how not to make a film”.

As an example, let’s have a look at the first scenes of his classic *Plan 9 From Outer Space*. First, the plot. Aliens are tired of being shot at by Americans when all they want to do is talk to the President. Plan 9 is a scheme to reanimate the recently dead in their thousands and send them all to Washington to pass on their message. There will simply be too many to kill, so some will be able to get through to the President.

The film opens in a cemetery where grave-diggers are digging a new hole – at night. We can tell it’s a cemetery by the small crosses hammered into the ground at random. The cemetery chapel is a garden toolshed with cardboard crenellations tacked on around the roof. The diggers are attacked by a reanimated corpse and call the police. A police car speeds to the scene in the middle of the night, but the film shows it driving in broad daylight. Later we get brilliant sets like a spaceship with sash windows (to let some fresh air in?).

Wood seemed a little confused about whether

he was making a science fiction film or a zombie film. He was also hampered by the death of his main drawcard star, Bela Lugosi, before filming was finished. Wood finished the film by simply substituting another actor, believed to be Wood’s chiropractor. He was noticeably taller and thinner than Lugosi and had to cover his face with his cloak, but Wood left the audience to sort it out.

Plan 9 was so shamelessly bad that it took over a year to find a distributor. It has probably done better in recent years as cult fans realised Wood’s true lack of genius, but on its release it bombed.

The film was funded by his local church after seeing some test scenes with Bela Lugosi. Lugosi was past his prime and suffering from a morphine addiction, but was still popular. The church allegedly backed the film on Wood’s assurance that it would make enough money for them to fund their pet project, twelve films about the life of the apostles.

Another popular actor among Wood’s regulars was the giant 400 pound Tor Johnson, a rather terrifying man in a film, who usually played the evil henchman. After Plan 9 flopped Wood’s popularity waned and he was reduced to writing and producing minor porn films and writing pulp







novels. Even so, the Wood touch still showed through. The 1956 exploitation film *Teenage Girl Gang* (later retitled *The Violent Years*) manages an abduction scene where a boyfriend is raped (thankfully, off-camera).

In 1958 he wrote a screenplay for a film called *Queen of the Gorillas*, later renamed *The Bride and the Beast*. The story had a gorilla reincarnated as a beautiful woman – it sounds like a typical Wood plot. In the same year he wrote and directed *Night Of The Ghouls*, a typical old house plus evil spirits film. Tor Johnson reappeared in this film. Wood doubled as a (female) ghoul in some scenes. Many scenes were taken from other Wood films to keep costs down. Wood couldn't afford to pay the film processing costs so this film was lost for many years until being rediscovered and issued in 1983.

This was probably his last "serious" film, if that's the right word. His career from here was mostly in exploitation and smut films like *Married Too Young* (scriptwriter) and *The Sinister Urge* (writer and director). *The Sinister Urge* was a reworked script he had written earlier and was



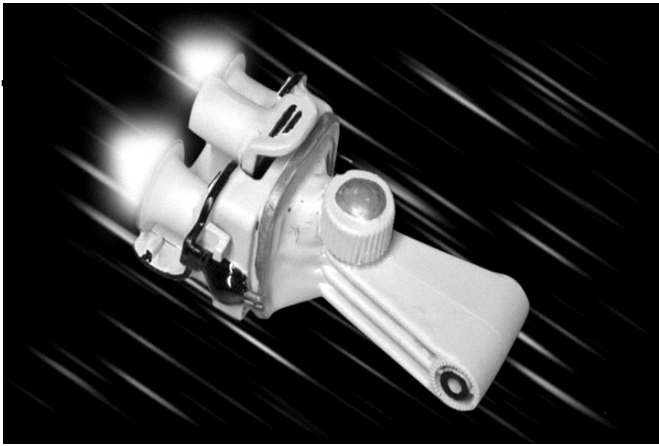
supposedly a warning about pornography and the smut film industry. It was shot in only five days.

Some things never changed. He made a brief appearance in the 1970s exploitation film *Mrs Stone's Thing* as a partygoer who spends the whole party trying on womens' lingerie.

Wood produced his last sexploitation film in 1977 but continued writing cheap lurid novels and screenplays. He was in poor health and in financial trouble. He suffered from depression and developed a drinking problem. In December 1978 he had a fatal heart attack. Although not well-regarded in the mainstream film industry, Wood received recognition after his death. He was awarded a Golden Turkey as the worst film producer of all time. There is even a Church of Ed Wood in California with thousands of baptised followers. They regard October 10, Wood's birthday, as Woodmas.

In a final irony a film was made on his life and films. *Ed Wood* (1994) was directed by Tim Burton, Johnny Depp played the part of Ed, and Martin Landau played Bela Lugosi. Few filmmakers can claim an honour like that.





## THE 50'S WORLD OF CHRISTOPHER MIHM

Christopher Mihm is unusual in the world of schlock. He doesn't actually make schlock, but he is a serious producer / director who wants to make good films in the style of the old '50s science fiction schlock.

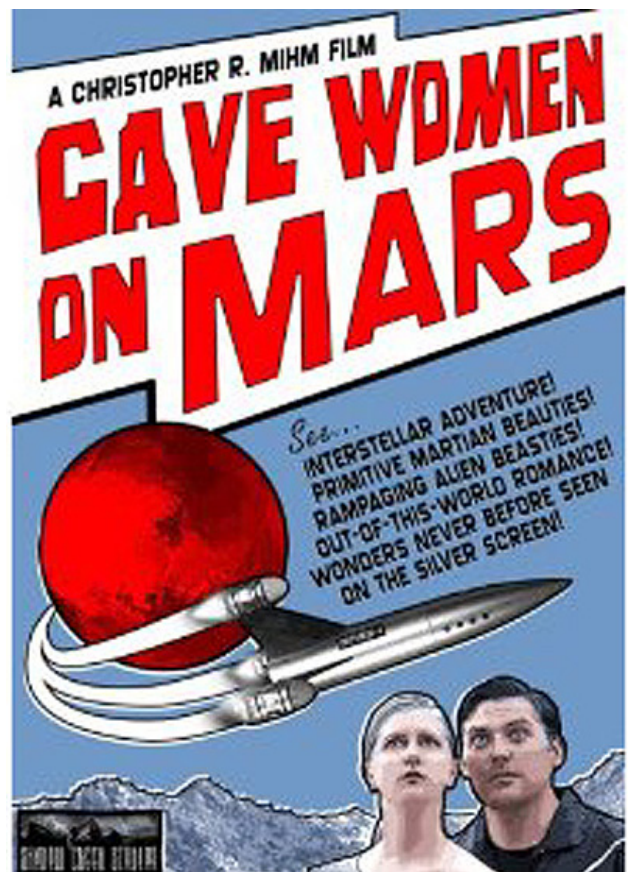
*"The reality is that I am absolutely not trying to make bad movies," says Mihm. "I really want to make really good movies of a particular style."*

In this he has succeeded, producing a type of fun film full of all the cheesy techniques of the period. The films are huge fun.

Currently he has six titles to his name.

**The Monster of Phantom Lake**  
**It Came From Another World**  
**Cave Women on Mars**  
**Terror From Beneath The Earth**  
**Destination: Outer Space**  
**Attack of the Moon Zombies (just released)**

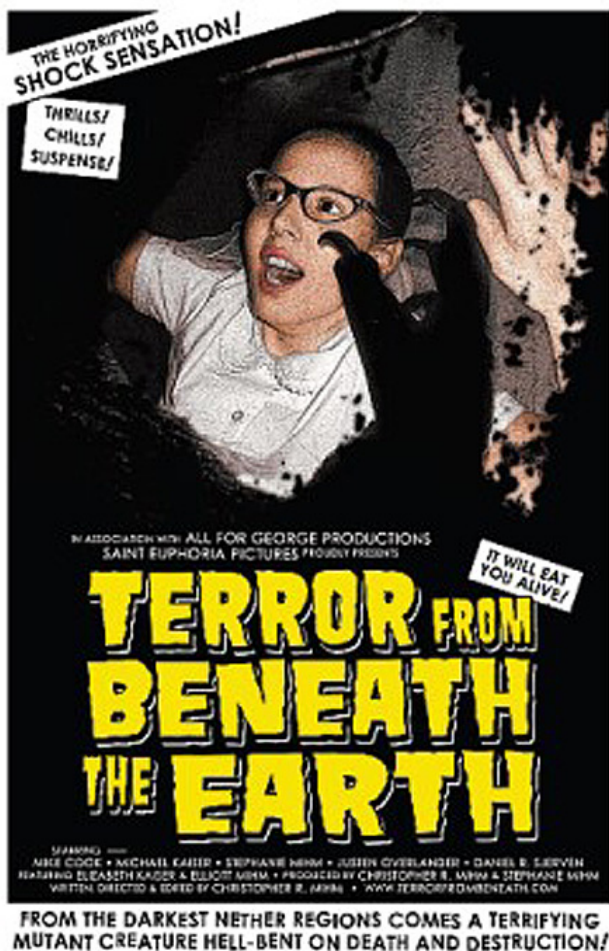
Even the titles reflect typical films of the '50s and it is obvious that Christopher Mihm really



knows and loves the genre. When he was young he watched many of the films with his father George, so it isn't surprising that his first film was based on that style and was really a tribute to his father.

Although the films are definitely B-grade and low-budget this is because that's what the genre demands. In this he differs from say Roger Corman, who produces quick B-movies because they sell. Parodies of the older schlock films are a specialist niche that has rarely been





explored. The only ones that come to mind are Amazon Women on the Moon, Flesh Gordon and The Lost Skeleton of Cadavra.

Nor are his films the crudely made rubbish of Ed Wood. The level of technical expertise is high and his parodies are deliberate. Ed Wood made parody films because he just didn't know how to do better.

Each of Mihm's films is full of little touches that show his comprehensive knowledge of the style. The lines are rather stilted and often delivered in a pompous Captain-Kirk style. Characters like the Canoe Cops ("the little critters of nature are so ugly") and Professor Jackson keep reappearing. Professor Jackson (played by friend and coproducer Josh Craig) speaks slowly... and deliberately, like ....this. The robot is the traditional cardboard-box-over-the-head, held together with duct tape. The Phantom Lake monster is the man-in-rubber-suit-with-bits-of-rubbish-attached. The laughter as a scene fades out is just that little bit too long, reflecting the poor editing of the day. Spacesuits have gold-

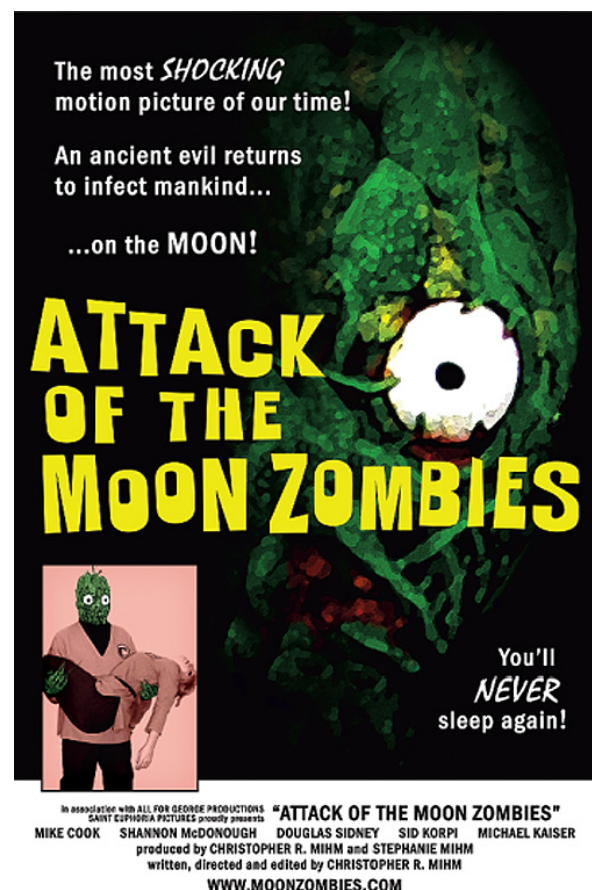
fish-bowl helmets held on by the ever-present duct tape. High-tech science is introduced in devices like the Evolutoscopic Spectronalizer..

Special effects, such as they are, look every bit as faked as they did in the original films. Even the backing tracks are appropriate, ranging from a stringy orchestral-type tune to the brassy sound of the old radio serials.

Every film has a naïve but absolutely lovable B-grade look, but beneath the look is a lot of very subtle construction. You do not doze off during a Christopher Mihm film, since there is so much to look out for. Nitpickers will have a field day and enjoy every minute of it. Every film has a blooper reel that shows just how difficult it can be to get such a film just right, from pingpong ball eyes that keep falling out to a very obvious rubber spider on a string that won't behave.

Mihm may be soon branching out into more conventional film with a script called A Home-made Funeral. He certainly has the skills to do it, but does this mean the end of Professor ..... Jackson? We hope not.

Web: <http://www.sainteuphoria.com>

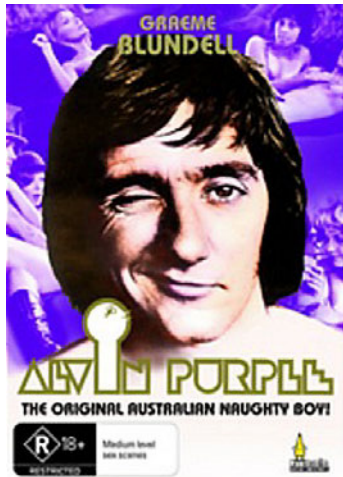


**Alvin Purple  
Umbrella  
Entertainment  
R4 DVD**

In the 1970s the tight morality of older Australians was being loosened. A new group of filmmakers and actors were doing films with an over-the-top enthusiasm and with no regard for the old cultural conservatism. This new genre became known as Ozploitation. The films usually had plots that were more imaginative, action that appealed to the younger audiences and heroes that were often more like antiheroes.

Alvin Purple was a lighthearted sex comedy in the style of films coming from Scandinavia. It did for sex in films what *Mad Max* was to do some years later for cars. It popularised a previously muted theme and brought fun into what "nice" people didn't talk about. In common with most films of the time genitals didn't exist, but unlike many films full frontal nudity was exploited for all it was worth, with furry bits where necessary. It was this that gave the film its controversial reputation.

Alvin (Graham Blundell) is basically a naïve young lad who is incredibly attractive to women. This started in his schooldays and has continued through his life. It's not so much that he objects to it, it's just that he is tired of being a sex



object. Even his job as a waterbed installer is quite tiring because the lonely housewives all want a "demonstration" before he leaves. Desperate, he turns to a psychologist (Penne Hackforth-Jones) who is also drawn to Alvin but tries to keep her lust under control. She refers Alvin to her boss, who tells Alvin that he doesn't need psychiatry, he needs vocational guidance. He sets Alvin up in a flat where Alvin provides "therapy" to tired and frustrated women referred to him by the doctor. Business is successful, but then the woman psychologist hears of it and demands that Alvin satisfy her needs as well.

Life starts to fall apart for Alvin. He can't help his patients properly because her insatiable demands leave Alvin falling asleep on the job, but she has threatened to spill the beans if he doesn't cooperate. Finally her boss disappears and she lets everyone know what has been going on. Alvin is now in court trying to prove that he didn't know that the "Doctor" had no psychiatric qualifications at all. What's more the doctor was making porno films of Alvin's performances from hidden cameras. They are selling under the counter for a hundred dollars apiece. Now Alvin's girlfriend has dropped him. He is notorious but even more popular with women, and their husbands are after him.

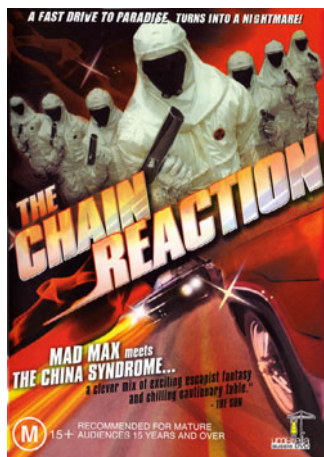
Alvin Purple did a lot to loosen the standards of films of the 70s. While nice, socially acceptable but utterly boring films like *Picnic At Hanging Rock* continued to be made it was the Ozploitation films that got the bums on the seats. It is good to see it again. The print is good for its age and the quality of the DVD is at least as good as most current films and much better than some of the indie films.





**The Chain Reaction**  
**Umbrella**  
**Entertainment**  
**All Regions DVD**

**The Chain reaction** is classic Ozploitation cinema directed and written by Ian Barry and Produced by David Elfick with George Miller and Ross Matthews.



A massive radioactive water spill at WALDO, a nuclear waste disposal facility, contaminates a young scientist. The company running the facility tries to cover up the spill, but the scientist escapes and takes refuge with a young couple enjoying a dirty weekend in their mountain valley retreat.

As WALDO gradually closes in ruthlessly on the dying scientist, the couple become more deeply involved to the point that their lives are now also at risk. With only one way in and out of the valley, staying ahead of WALDO is difficult but necessary until they can get the word out of the impending ecological disaster.

This film is one of the "Ozploitation" series covered in *Not Quite Hollywood*. It was possibly intended as an alternative anti-nuclear protest film to *The China Syndrome* from the previous year, but with the addition of crowd-pleasing car chases and beautiful scenery. In the process it turned into more of a thriller than a protest movie.

The film nearly didn't make it. Ian Barry was way over budget, and George Miller, director of *Mad Max* from the year before, was called in to do the car chases and stunts. For this reason the film has more in common with *Mad Max*, including many of the actors. Even Mel Gibson makes a brief appearance as a mechanic. This is not, however, to put down Barry's work in any way. Russell Boyd's beautiful cinematography of the quiet rural valley and community is a stark contrast to the fierce action sequences, and the contrast heightens the drama of the story.

The film was definitely low-budget (\$450,000) and sometimes the film shows this. Footage of the waste facility is poorly integrated, the plot is sometimes thin, and Steve Bisley's acting as the



hero is often a bit rough. This is not so much due to his acting ability as to a plot that simply doesn't give him much room to develop.

The same can be said for the female lead, Arna-Maria Winchester. Even a couple of nude scenes can't make up for minimal character development. I guess this is just a symptom of a crippling budget. Possibly the best acting comes from Ross Thompson as Heinrich, the dying scientist.

Still, what the film lacks in polish is made up for by scenery, stunts and enthusiasm. In spite of its age, the film still works. Critically, even though the film is nearly thirty years old, the problems it raises are still with us. The film has been out of print for many years, so it's good to see it cleaned up and re-released by Umbrella. It may not be Australia's greatest film, but it's still a good watch.

*The Chain Reaction* is presented in Anamorphic Widescreen.

## Howling III: The Marsupials

R4

Umbrella Entertainment

The *Howling* was a much celebrated Eighties werewolf film which combined excellent special effects (for the time) with an intelligent and challenging plot. Surprisingly it is still on the list of most watched werewolf films today. However, something very strange occurred between *The Howling* and *Howling III*. *Howling III* is rip roaring cult cinema and Ozploitation at its most cheesy. It has everything you would hope for in a B grade horror as well as mercilessly exploiting Australian cultural themes along the way.

The background to *Howling III* is that the Australian Aboriginals worship an animal spirit known as Emunen which is the magical essence of the Tasmanian Tiger. It seems the Tiger was not hunted for its fur, but because it had the ability to shape change. When the last Tiger died its spirit became the totem for a group of lycanthropes which had been born from the passionate union of a man and a female Tiger. There are many werewolf clans worldwide but the one in Australia is unique, just like a lot of Australian wildlife. They are marsupials and bring up their young in a pouch. A small clan of these lycanthropes have survived isolated in the country village of Flow, their patri-

### Marsupial Werewolf Baby !



arch is the unpredictable Thylo. Jerboa is a young member of the clan and is sick of Thylo's sexual advances. She decides to run away and finds herself in Sydney, with no money or food. Lucky for her, she is found by Donny, who not only falls instantly in love with her but offers her a lead in a horror film called "Shapeshifters". Yes, there is lot of irony, self deprecating and self referencing horror humour throughout the film and yes, most of it is pretty lame.

Donny and Jerboa get quickly down to business and made wild passionate love, animal style. However, while she is asleep he notices strange things about her anatomy including rather a lot of hair and what looks like an opening in her abdomen. Surprisingly he doesn't seem to care. Ahh ! That's love for you !

As *Shapeshifters* nears completion they hold a celebration party. While marsupial werewolves are not affected by the full moon, they are effected by flashing lights.

The disco strobes at the party begin to trigger a transformation. To avoid killing her new found lover she runs into the night and straight into oncoming traffic, she is taken to a local hospital.

Of course, this is where the story becomes complicated. The hospital staff are not sur-





prisingly rather confused by her anatomy and condition. Beckmayer has been researching werewolves for some years and had read the reports about the Russian Clan, he takes over the medical treatment of Jerboa. However, the military believe they are a threat and want her and her kind out of the way.

It seems that ever since the early 1900s the English and American governments on the advice of the Vatican have been working to exterminate all werewolves since they are satanic.

They believed that the Australian marsupial werewolf (read Tasmanian Tiger) was extinct but now the threat has resurfaced. When Jerboa is kidnapped by three werewolves dressed as nuns and taken back to Flow, the military are put on high alert. The werewolf clan and Jerboa are now at great risk, Beckmayer, her lover and the military are hot on their trail and a lot of blood will be shed.

This is Ozploitation cinema taken to the next level. The sheer political incorrectness of rewriting aboriginal dream time legends to include a werewolf cult is breathtaking and loads of fun !! Probably the most celebrated scenes is the uniquely Aussie marsupial werewolf Jerboa giving birth. We get to see a little baby werewolf climb out of Jerboa's nether regions and crawl along her abdomen into her pouch. This is so truly bizarre it is astounding – a uniquely Aus-

tralian werewolf cinematic experience ! The little lycanthrope continues to grow and looks so damn cute you just want to adopt one !

There is also a cold war tale involving a Russian werewolf clan (who are of a different sub genus and not marsupials) and Olga, a defector who has come to Australia to bring new blood to the Australian werewolf clan. Incidentally, the Aussie werewolf clan look very much like hippies and live in a broken down village protected by a local aboriginal werewolf who has a special link to the great Tasmanian Tiger spirit called Emunen!

*Howling III* is lots of fun. The special effects are cheesy and the plot is convoluted and bizarre – it seems to pack in every possible werewolf motif that could be written into it. The acting is pretty woeful, which is strange when you consider it stars literally everyone who was anyone in Australian cinema at the time from Barry Otto to Frank Thring and god knows how many others. There are even cameo appearances by Barry Humphries as Dame Edna Everage and Bill Collins. *Howling III* is absolute must see Ozploitation, it is pure trash and takes the werewolf film to places it has never gone before or again !

It is one of the most unique and bizarre cult films ever made and will have you howling long into the night...with laughter !

## Turkey Shoot Umbrella R4 DVD

**Turkey Shoot** is the epitome of Ozploitation cinema, directed by infamous director Brian Trenchard-Smith, it is a totally over the top cult classic.



It is generally seen as one of the first Australian films to attempt to tap into the success of the **Mad Max** films. With a strongly futuristic tone influenced by the post Apocalyptic science fiction of the period with lashings of the **Most Dangerous Game** (1932).

While these serious concepts may underlie the film and its portrayal of a totalitarian re-education camp has quite significant cinematic heritage, **Turkey Shoot** turns the whole genre into high camp with incredible over acting, extreme violence and political incorrectness.

It is 1995 and the way in which society deals with its non-conforming members is to send them to re-education camps. These work camps use a variety of methods, violent and otherwise, to break and reform their prisoners.

A small group of new prisoners arrive for rehabilitation. Chris Walters, who had the misfortune to protest against the violence she saw by the police, Rita Daniels, who is accused of prostitution and Paul Landers, a radical who ran a pirate radio station.

The camp itself is run by a group of spoilt upper



### Politically incorrect action of Turkey Shoot

class debauchees who seem to take pleasure in the sadistic torture of the prisoners. Each year "Thatcher", the camps warden, offers the ultimate form of sporting entertainment for visiting officials, a turkey shoot. Each of the guests have their own weapons of choice and they choose a prisoner to hunt. Four prisoners are told that if they can evade their pursers for 24 hours they will have their freedom, but nothing is quite as it seems as the truth is that the camp is on an Island and there is no escape !



**Turkey Shoot** was notorious at the time for its lashings of violence, rape, gore and brutality. It's bizarre characters only added to the strange mix ranging from a stereotypical lesbian sexual predator in Carmen Duncan to a sideshow freak who is the special friend of visiting hunter Tito. This is not to mention the prison guards who are as dumb as dogshit. It has some truly extreme moments including when Alf, Tito's offside, breaks off and eats the toe of the prisoner they are hunting! It revels in excess and uses as much gratuitous sex and violence as it can pack into its approximate 90 minutes.

**Turkey Shoot** still polarizes its audience; David Stratton once described it as 'a catalogue of sickening horrors' while Quentin Tarantino continues to sing its praises. In 2008 it is considered one of the ultimate Ozploitation titles !

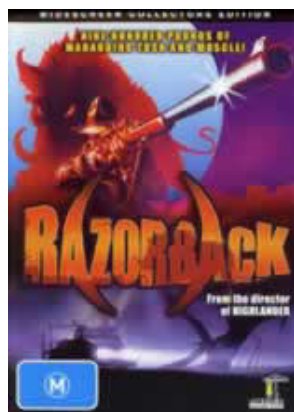
The edition from Umbrella is truly stunning, a 16 x 9 high quality print with some superb documentaries including "Blood and Thunder Memories" – memories from such Turkey Shoot survivors (!) as Michael Craig, Lynda Stoner and Roger Ward and "A Good Soldier" – a comprehensive interview with director Brian Trenchard-Smith.

Turkey Shoot is available as a single DVD and as part of the Umbrella Ozploitation Box Set.



**Razorback**  
**Umbrella**  
**R4**

*Razorback* is a surprisingly impressive monster film set in outback Australia with the cinematography of an art film and the plot of a cult exploitation classic.



Directed by Russell Mulcahy, who up until this time was mainly known for his music videos and later went on to direct *Highlander*, *Resident Evil Extinct* and even episodes of the English edition of *Queer as Folk*, it has a sense of style not normally seen in cult films.

At the time it was derided for having style over substance, but I think this as uncharitable. The reality is that many films use style as a way to tell a story – colour, shadow, imagery, symbols, sound – and a non linear approach to storytelling is common in Europe cinema particularly, Italian horror comes to mind.

*Razorback* has surprisingly impressive cinematography and is actually a rather moody and layered film, on DVD it is quite a visual feast. There are lots of memorable scenes, moody set pieces and even some nice dream sequences. There is a constant use of strange images ranging from crows to surreal night landscapes and symbolic images.

Certainly it is a strange amalgam of genres, it is *Jaws* in the outback with a giant pig (*Razorback*), a country inbred horror tale and meat eaters versus animal liberationists. It seems to mix an art film sensibility with a cult genre film approach and this combination is unusual to say the least, but that just makes it more unique and more of Ozploitation classic !!

The film is packed with stereotypes and caricatures which have a dark humour about them, they are so extreme, so over the top that they are both shocking and amusing. Petpak is just so utterly repulsive you cannot believe it and yet it works. Having seen *Razorback* a few times, I see something more every time I watch it; I would really categorize it as a dark fantasy since so many elements seem to be a mixture of reality and perverse fantasy. The soundtrack

by Iva Davies of Icehouse is excellent and creates a great atmosphere. But, I should be honest, there are some problems and that major one is the *Razorback* ! It must be the worst mechanical animal ever created ! It looks terrible and as you will hear in the documentary it was literally a giant stuffed pig on wheels which could hardly be moved !

In addition, certainly some of the acting also leaves a little to be desired, I found Jake Cullen as the haunted grandfather wanting to avenge the death of his grandchild a bit wooden and unconvincing, but the others were reasonable.

The storyline is bizarre yet captivating. Jack Cullen is looking after his grandchild and without much warning, his house is torn apart by a large pig like creature and explodes. It seems the pig has taken away the child for a late night snack ! Nobody believes his story and he is put on trial in a local court for murder. While he is acquitted he becomes a pariah and so he begins a vendetta against the *Razorback*. Cut to years later...

An American TV investigator comes to an outback town to document the killing of Kangaroos by Petpak to make cheap and nasty pet food. She obviously makes enemies pretty quickly and when she decides to make a night time clandestine visit to Petpak she has overstepped the mark. Two rather perverse brothers, Benny and Dicko decide to rough her up, indeed Dicko wants to take it much further, but before they can have their fun the *razorback* tears her and her car apart in a rather impressive and graphic scene.

Her husband travels to Australia to find his missing wife and the search for the pig begins... The edition from *Umbrella* is a great 16.9 transfer and is beautifully clear with a 5.1 soundtrack. Having originally seen this on video on its first release, it is marvellous to see such a high quality print. It really shows off the cinematography and the soundtrack by Iva Davies sounds awesome in Dolby Digital 5.1

*Umbrella* has not scrimped on the extras either, this release includes some great extras including *Jaws* on *Trotters*, a seventy minute documentary, an audio interview with Gregory Harrison, deleted scenes, a stills and poster gallery and more..

**The Man from Hong Kong  
Madman  
Entertainment  
R4 DVD**

*The Man from Hong Kong* is a superb example of exploitation cinema, it was a strange Seventies martial arts spectacular where absolutely everything was taken to an extreme.



*The Man from Hong Kong* was unusual in many ways; it was a co production between Golden Harvest and The Movie Company which was sponsored by the Australian Film Commission, a newly formed government body funding Aussie films. It stars Jimmy Wang Yu as a hard fighting and hard lovin' Hong Kong police operative and George Lazenby as the evil drug kingpin who also happens to be a martial arts expert.

Throughout the film are ludicrously long fight sequences, lots of bloody hand to hand combat, an incredible array of car crashes and some awesome hand gliding. It is literally packed with stunt work having employed some of the better known stuntmen from both Hong Kong and Australia including Grant Page, Corey Yuan and Yuen Biao.

The "Australianness" is a unique aspect of *The Man from Hong Kong* from the great shots of Sydney to the raucous humour. It is also filled with politically incorrect comments - certainly the Chinese jokes would prove rather insensitive in any film today.

The film opens with an amazing drug bust at what was then Ayers Rock (now called Uluru). Certainly today it is unlikely any stunt team would get permission to do a fight sequence up and down the sides of what is considered a sacred site ! It is a real beauty, filled with great visuals and superb action.

When Aussie cops can't get anything out of the courier, they call Inspector Fang of the Hong Kong Special Branch to escort him home.

However, Fang has other ideas and beats the hell out of the courier to find who his Australian



contact is. When he learns that the drug kingpin is Jack Wilton (George Lazenby), a well known Sydney identity and seemingly untouchable criminal mastermind, he sets out to get his man.

As he attempts to get to Wilton the body count increases as Wilton attempts to get Fang out of the way and Fang works his way through Wilton's men. The final showdown is superbly over the top and what could have simply been a "bad James Bond clone" film is elevated to a real cult classic. There is so much in this film which is quirky and eccentric, from the constantly exaggerated fight scenes (both the martial arts school scene and the climactic scene between Wilton and Fang come to mind) to the truly amazing car chase sequence – just how many cars did they crash and burn ?

Extras include the rare Brian Trenchard-Smith films *Kung Fu Killers* and *Hospital's Don't Burn !*





**Stunt Rock**  
**Madman**  
**Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

Stunt Rock is another exploitation classic from Brian Trenchard Smith.

It seems that Smith developed quite a liking for his stuntman Grant Page and decided to use him as the nexus of many of his B grade films. Obviously it is a cheap way to make cult films if you can combine your stuntman with your lead actor and use old footage and interviews along the way !

Starting with Deathcheaters, Page was turned from stuntman into actor, which proved difficult as he really couldn't act even if his life depending on it ! In Stunt Rock Trenchard Smith pulls every trick in the book, he creates a minimal plot and packs it with all manner of stock footage and every conceivable stunt created by Page, even including a couple where Page was injured! Ahh, the joys to exploitation cinema.

The plot, as it is, centres on Grant Page travelling from Australia to Los Angeles to complete a series of stunts for a television series. His first stunt, a car accident, lands him in hospital but against his doctors orders he leaves the hospital (rather unofficially, out of a fifth story window) and gets back to work.

As he performs his stunts, he makes friends with the star of the series and with Lois Wells, a



newspaper report trying to understand his craft. She provides the possible romantic interest to add some pizzazz to the plot.

Along the way he meets the glam rock band Sorcery through a friend and this allows Smith to show an inordinate amount of their live show to help fill out the 90 minutes of the film.

The film really is padded out with a ridiculous amount of stock footage showing stunts by Page from such films as Mad Dog Morgan, The Man from Hong Kong and Gone in Sixty Seconds. These are shown at every opportunity and related to the script by minimal links, occasionally they are edited with split screens and other innovations to make them seem creative !

There is even a segment showing the history of stunt work and some interviews and pep talks by Page on stunt work. While these are vaguely interesting, it shows just how disorganized the plot truly is, it meanders all over the place and seems to have no idea at all what the film is actually about or where it is going.

To make sure it doesn't end up looking too much like a documentary (and it certainly seems to head in that direction) Smith adds the little known Seventies glam rock band Sorcery into the mix. They are typical glam rockers with a penchant for occult themes and magic stage antics, the one thing they seem to have trouble doing is singing—they seem to scream and wail and be constantly off key.

Their songs really are terrible (their classic number woman seems to have all of five words in the whole song) and their stage antics in which a wizard does battle with the devil are painfully amateur even for the glam rock era.

The combination of stunts, glam rock, bad acting, more stunts, stock footage and a plot which is nonexistent makes this an unbeatable work of cult cinema.

Silly, inane and yet brimming with action, this is Ozploitation cinema at its most ridiculous.

This is a superb release from Madman Entertainment and also includes the film The Stuntmen by Brian Trenchard Smith.



# Dying Breed

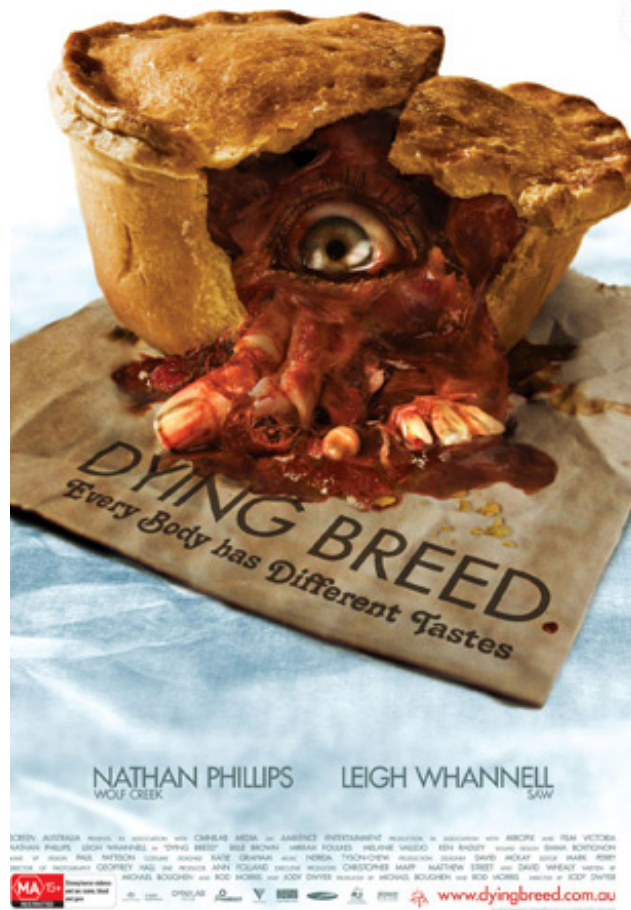
**Dying Breed**  
**R4 DVD**  
**Sony Entertainment**

Ozploitation cinema is something which is ever so unique and exciting; indeed it is my favourite type of film. Combining exploitation and unique Australian content it offers something which stands out from other genres of cult entertainment. Generally, Ozploitation cinema has been a thing of the past with films primarily made during the Seventies and Eighties and yet with the appearance of *Dying Breed* a fresh breath of air has been breathed into an old genre.

*Dying Breed* brings together so many traditional exploitation themes from cannibalism to in-breeding, human meat pies to mantraps, a perverse twist on Australian history to supposedly extinct Tasmanian Tigers.

The film opens with a horrific retelling of the end of the life of Alexander Peirce, the Pieman. He was a real character from Australian history who was so degraded and mistreated by the authorities that he turned to cannibalism to survive on escape. As an Irishman he had a seething hatred for the English who ran the penal settlements and did everything he could to get out. He was the only prisoner to escape Sarah Island and survive.

He convinced seven convicts to go with him and



when he arrived on the other side of Tasmania was the only one left. He had eaten the others during the journey and has their remains in his pockets.

As he is hunted down by the British, he reaches the edge of a cliff and faces off against a British officer, as he bites out the officers throat, he sees the elusive Tasmanian tiger and then falls to his death. However, that is not the end of Pierce, it seems he has fathered many children and his descendants live isolated in the village of Sarah to this day.

We then cut to the present and Nina is on the way to Tasmania with her boyfriend Matt, totally obnoxious city boy Jack and his girlfriend Rebecca. Nina's sister went missing in Tasmania some eight years and was later found drowned.





However, she left a tantalizing clue, a record of what looks like a fresh Tasmanian tiger print. Nina wants to complete her sister's work and find the elusive tiger. A million bucks on offer also offers encouragement !

She also has some nagging doubts about her sister's death and these are exacerbated by strange visions of her sister being raped and tortured and by reports of many missing tourists in the same region. So off they go following in her footsteps.

Soon they reach the last known place where Nina's sister stayed, a small isolated township called "Sarah". The village seems like a place out of time, obsessively devoted to its Irish heritage and to the "Pieman" – indeed their speciality is their meat pies which are celebrated throughout the region !

The locals seem like a very strange bunch, friendly yet with hostility just under the surface. They are more than a bit like Jack, who seems to want to start fights with everyone and he soon has a major run-in with a local, things are



not off to a good start.

As they head out into the landscape, and it is certainly superb looking countryside, they find they are not just hunting the Tiger but they are being hunted as well. The hunting motif is nicely explored throughout the film. Pierce hunted by the British, the Tiger hunted to extinction (well, perhaps), Jack hunting local animals and the city dwellers hunted by the inbred Tassie folk.

The acting is professional, the look of the film convincing and the photography of the Tasmanian landscape is quite stunning. The juxtaposition of the brutality of both the city and country folk and the sheer beauty of the landscape comes through clearly. I found quite poignant Nina quietly watching a rabbit and Jack suddenly shooting a cross bow bolt through it for dinner.

The torture and bloodshed is at a pretty high level and very well done. It will certainly have you cringing but in my mind the violence is not gratuitous and fits well with the context of the film.

It would be easy to see this film as being filled with stereotypes and caricatures, yet this would be a superficial reading of the film. Good exploitation and horror cinema takes well used themes and brings new life to them and this is what *Dying Breed* does.

It takes the sort of inbred horror of *The Hills Have Eyes*, creature feature stories and a unique take on the cannibal tale to make a very memorable and bloody horror film. All this and a good Aussie twist as well – what more could you ask for !

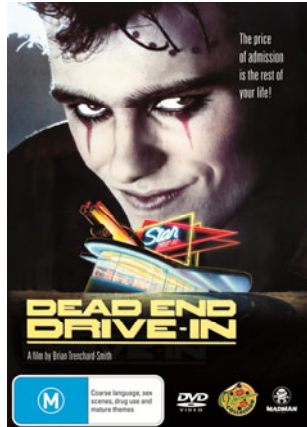
**Dead End Drive-In  
R4 DVD  
Madman Ent.**

Dead End Drive-In is a classic example of Australian genre cinema, exploitation at its most bizarre. This was the Eighties when Post Apocalyptic cinema ruled and Mad Max was the success story of the day. Cult film director Brian Trenchard-Smith was a rather successful maverick filmmaker and decided to have a go at making a film of the short story Crabs by well known Australian author Peter Carey.

The opening titles set the scene: race wars in South Africa, a second Wall Street crash and huge riots during Australia's bicentennial year, a prelude to the use of emergency powers by the government. You think you are in for a serious examination of the state of a world in decline, and then the film starts....

Crabs is a skinny runt, his brother is big and strong and runs a pick-up truck company which must fight against other companies, corrupt police and gangs of car obsessed street trash to make his living.

Crabs yearns to be like his big brother but instead works as a delivery boy in a mini. The first scenes of the film illustrate the two major themes which run throughout, cars and post apocalyptic culture. I certainly thought the second Wall Street fall and the collapse of financial systems rather ominous considering the state of the present day world economic system.



Crabs convinces his brother to lend him his Chevy (his brother's pride and joy). He decides to use it to impress Carmen his girlfriend and go to the drive in a goodtime. When they arrive they find Turkey Shoot (another Trenchard-Smith spectacular) on the big screen, not that they see any of it. In the middle of their rather passionate lovemaking the car grinds and lurches and Crabs finds his wheels have been stolen. However, it doesn't end there, they have been taken by the police who patrol the drive-in and hence getting them back is not an option.

In the morning they try and report them stolen and discuss getting home and get a very rude shock. There is no transport or cabs from the drive-in and the highway that leads to it is patrolled as a no walking zone and those caught get three months in jail. It seems the drive-in is used by the government as an unofficial youth prison to get trouble makers off the street. Crabs and Carmel must now live on the free junk food and drugs provided and turn the car into their home.

In a world with rampant youth crime and violence, the "Dead End Drive-In" seems to be the government's solution to street crime. However, Crabs is not seduced by this supposedly easy life and wants out. Of course, this is not as simple as it seems as he must battle against petty criminals, others who want his car parts and the police and government.

This is a strange and rather silly film which brings together what seems to be the major obsessions of Australia in the Eighties – cars and the Apocalypse. This is no Mad Max, but it is fun, eccentric and above all great exploitation cinema. There is lots of action, lots of flesh and lots of teen rebellion. Cars, accidents and road wars rule and the fight scenes are kind of cool.



This release from Madman is faultless, to the honest the perfect quality of the print, which literally has no signs of wear, is probably far more than the film deserves!!

The sound is Dolby Digital 2.00 and so clear your ears will complain about the constant Eighties soundtrack.



### Ozploitation Vol 3 Umbrella DVD R4 DVD

The Ozploitation compilations comprise early Australian films dating from the 1970s. The industry was finally becoming better financed and the censorship rules were being relaxed. Many filmmakers were funded by the new Australian Film Commission, who may have received a surprise when they saw what sort of films they were funding.

The films ranged across a number of genres. There was the *Barry Mackenzie* series, each a little more gross than the last. Although some people were insulted, many liked the hard-drinking sex-mad caricature Aussie. This sort of film generally faded away as scripts and production staff got better. Some films like *Australia After Dark* were simply exploitation films designed to appeal to the tits'n'bums market but even these gradually improved in quality. They developed plots and a touch of comedy that made films like *Alvin Purple* popular. Sex was still popular in films like *Felicity* but this was more like beautifully filmed erotica than smutty titillation.

Some films explored other genres than sex and comedy. Patrick is a dark chiller of a film. *Mad Dog Morgan* and *Ned Kelly* looked at Australia's colonial history from the bushranger viewpoint and *Eliza Fraser* (1976) was based on a shipwreck on Moreton Island where Eliza was captured by local aborigines.

One thing was common to many Australian films – an overseas actor in the starring role. This “cultural cringe” was a common problem at the time and it took a while for the Australian actors to overcome it. They were helped by the early film of *Ned Kelly* that starred Mick Jagger. His acting was so bad that by contrast the Australians looked like well-trained professionals.

This third compilation has more of the schlock we came to expect from these days, but it also has examples of the better films that were being made. It shows the steady improvement in the industry, with hardly a kangaroo to be seen.



### The ABC of Love and Sex 1977 Umbrella Entertainment Ozploitation Vol 3 R4 DVD Set

Director Paul Lamond was undoubtedly the king of Australian schlock. Although he went on to do quite good mainstream films he first made his reputation with films like this one. Compared with *Australia After Dark* this is a fairly restrained film, with less nudity and more serious content. It is made as a mockumentary training film for sex education, but it's not fooling anyone – it still has enough gratuitous nudity to keep the audience happy.

The format is simple. It goes through the ABC putting a sexual or romantic function to each letter and then “illustrating” it with film clips. This is definitely educational, or something. Some of the clips are quite extended, probably to help the slow learners. I would not recommend the film, though, as a way of teaching kiddies their ABC. It could lead to some embarrassing questions.

For some unknown reason Lamond thought it





was necessary to have a pair of rather beefy-looking dancers introduce each letter. This would have been better if they were nude.

The film is not a great piece of work as it stands but it is historically valuable as it marks a point where the Australian film industry branched out into previously forbidden areas. There's not a kangaroo or koala in sight.'

**Australia After Dark 1975  
Umbrella Entertainment  
Ozploitation Vol 3  
R4 DVD Set**

The relaxation of censorship laws in Australia did not always lead to more interesting films. Echoing the U.S. experience many producers, especially John Lamond, produced quicky schlock films that simply concentrated on getting as much nudity as possible on celluloid. Australia After Dark is definitely one of these.

37 segments purport to show Australian night-life, although most of the film segments happen



in daylight. We have such culturally enlightening moments as life in a bikini shop, a stripper who may or may not be a male, and as much topless or nude swimming as they can get away with. Occasionally a segment is slipped in that does not feature nude women, such as the Henley-on-Todd regatta at Darwin, held in a dry riverbed. We also have Tully, the "Flying Saucer Capital of Australia". We have the old Pentridge gaol and death masks of people who were hung there. This is probably intended to be educational content. But then it's back to the nudity. The segment of the initiation of a witch "in a forest outside Melbourne" is downright laughable, but even here we get a nude female sacrifice. Probably just as well – Melbourne needed some nightlife.

The whole show comes across as one of those giggly schoolboyish "aren't we naughty" films. The women are pretty much what we saw on the beach every weekend in those days so there was no real shock element in the film.

You couldn't even call it a "film industry coming-of-age" because of its pure schlock content. Still, it's fun to watch to recall those days on the







beach before skin cancer. It is also a reminder that Australia could produce bad exploitation films just like the rest of the world, so it is good to see it included in this collection.

**Barry Mackenzie Holds His Own 1974  
Umbrella Entertainment  
Ozploitation Vol 3  
R4 DVD Set**

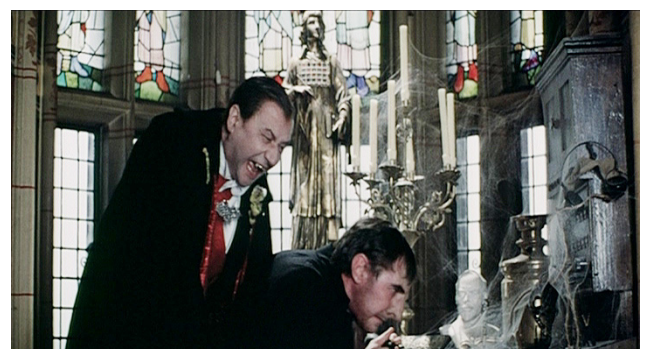
This sequel to *The Adventures of Barry Mackenzie* (1974) did not seem much different from the earlier film. The same jokes, the same coarseness and racism, the same Barry Humphries in drag - they are all there once more. As such the film relies on plot to keep it going. Does it succeed?

Barry and his Aunt Edna are on their way back to Australia but Edna is confused for Princess Elizabeth by a pair of Transylvanian agents who kidnap her. I don't know how they could confuse



a fat, ageing drag queen for a young, slim princess, but this is one of those films where you put aside your critical faculties and just enjoy the story. Edna must be rescued by Barry (we find his real name is Barrington), his brother who is a priest, and the usual bunch of drunken, brawling, chundering mates.

Along the way we get British jokes, French jokes, women jokes, chundering, and other classy acts of the sort that almost defined the two films. Australians were not really like this (I hope) but sometimes it is fun watching yourself being caricatured. There is a heartwarming scene where British actor John Le Mesurier plays a would-be immigrant who can win Australian citizenship through a game-style quiz show. The questions are predictably along the line of "what country has the best beaches, drive-through bottle shops, marsupials, etc in the world?". The answers, of course, are "Australia" - all except the trick question at the end "Which country is the arsehole of the world?". Another nice scene is where the Minister for Kultcha





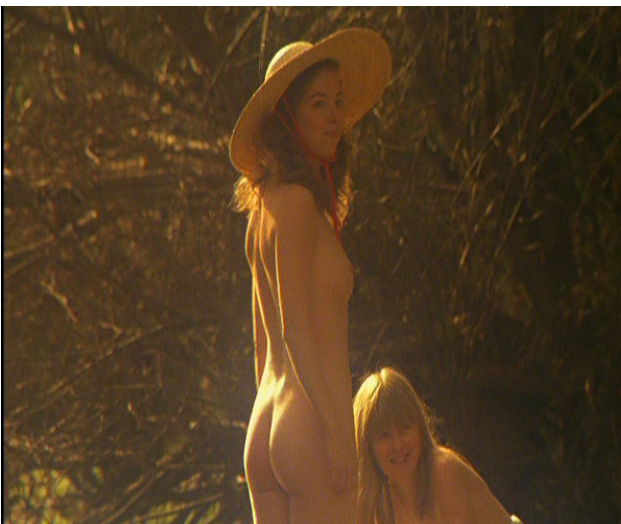
introduces the film as the first English-language films with English subtitles. The audience will need this to follow the accents and many of the jokes.

The supposed Aussie slang is still there and is sometimes quite inventive – I will leave you to work out what “putting the ferret through the hairy hoop” means. The film has some song and dance routines that do nothing for it.

The film, like its predecessor, is pure schlock but it’s funny enough to be worth looking at again – if only to ask “why did they make this rubbish?”

**Felicity 1979**  
**Umbrella Entertainment**  
**Ozploitation Series 3**  
**R4 DVD**

The relaxation of censorship laws in Australia in the 70s spawned a range of more erotic films than the country had seen before. Unlike most U.S. productions, though, the Australian films were made to the same quality guidelines as regular films. There were no “quicky” films to flood the porn market as in the U.S. Perhaps



our directors just didn’t know how to make a porno? Some films were designed to be a bit of fun, like the Alvin Purple films, most films now included a bit of nudity, but some were quite artistic and tasteful in their filming and construction. Felicity is one of these.

Felicity, played by the lovely Glory Annen, is a Catholic schoolgirl at a girls’ college where any mention of sex is suppressed. Nice girls just don’t do that sort of thing. Her only comfort to her hormonal urges is feelie sessions with her best friend and the occasional exhibitionism for the local boys – purely by accident, of course. She is invited to holiday in Hong Kong with her sister and she gives her sexual urges full rein, going at it for all she’s worth. Not to put it too politely, she becomes a bit of a slut. Still, true love triumphs in the end.







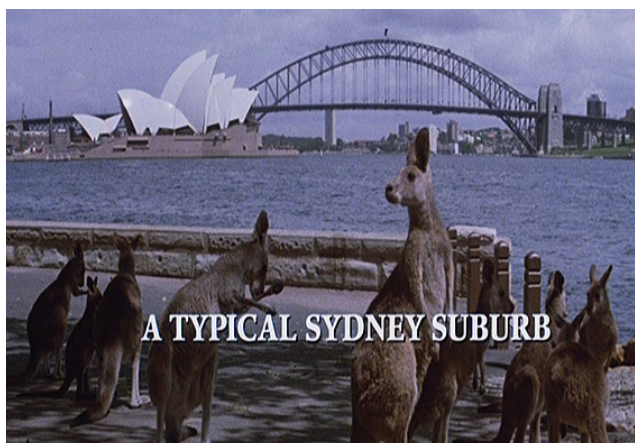
Apart from the exotic Hong Kong footage the film could just as well have been made in Bendigo, but the Hong Kong shots give it a more cosmopolitan look. If only the director hadn't changed to soft focus every time Felicity gets it on.

There are some nice little touches in the film, such as John-Michael Howson playing a camp womens' clothing salesman (or is he really camp? Felicity's sister notes that he seems to like his work dressing naked women too much).

By Australian standards the film was pretty raunchy at the time. Even by today's standards it is a rather nice erotic story.

**Les Patterson Saves The World 1987**  
**Umbrella**  
**Ozploitation Series 3**  
**R4 DVD**

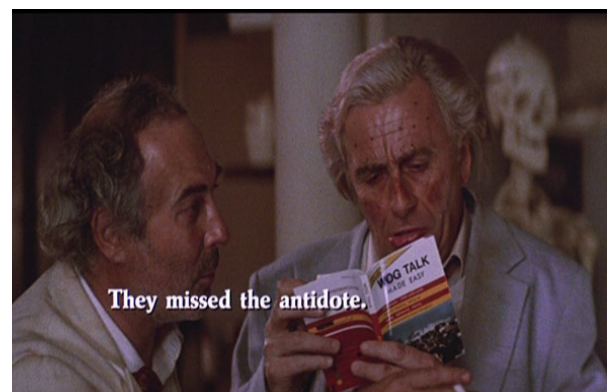
Not all the New Wave Australian films were in the same class as Mad Max or Gallipoli. Les Patterson was so bad it even offended Australians with its crude stereotypes. A large part of



the problem was due to Barry Humphries, the producer and lead actor. He and his wife also wrote the film. He had a stage show character, Edna Everage, who was supposed to be a parody of an Australian housewife.

This character did not translate well to film and the whole plot seems to be simply a series of bad taste jokes often promoting Edna Everage. Normally this wouldn't matter to Australians but the sad truth is that the jokes just weren't very good. Neither was the sight of an ageing cross-dresser trying to be funny with the old jokes that we had already seen in his stage show. Australians were becoming more sophisticated and this crude humour was losing out to the quality comedy shows and films being imported from Britain's BBC.

Humphries also played Les Patterson, a more interesting if disgusting character. His part as the hard drinking, farting, whoring Australian diplomat is more like what you would expect from a pub comedian – simple crude jokes, slapstick and perhaps more importantly the rac-







ist attitude that was rampant in Australia at the time.

Lampooning this attitude wasn't really necessary though – attitudes were already changing and so many of the film's rather racist jokes look a bit dated. It is this slight out-of-dateness that stamps the film as schlock rather than true comedy.

The film does have moments of brilliance to keep it going, though. As an example there is a scene of "a typical Australian suburb" with the Opera House and Harbour Bridge in the background and a mob of kangaroos in the foreground. This seems to be a dig at the attitudes of tourists who apparently fully expected to see kangaroos hopping down the street. The exploding koala was a nice touch.

There are many well-known Australians in the film. Our industry was young and there wasn't much of a pool of talent to draw on so we tended to see the same actors or actresses in many



different films. It was a surprise, though, to see Hugh Keays-Burne, the head of the bikie group in Mad Max, as Inspector Farouk in this film. He played the part to perfection – frankly, better than Humphries played his own parts. We also see a number of foreign actors and actresses. Australia was not yet confident enough about its films to rely entirely on local talent.

The film is not as good perhaps as Barry Humphries Holds His Own, but it is still a bit of fun.

**Mad Dog Morgan 1976**  
**Ozploitation Series 3**  
**Umbrella Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

Some years earlier we had seen Ned Kelly, starring Mick Jagger. The film was widely regarded as badly acted rubbish. Mick Jagger may have been a good singer but his acting skills were zero. His attempts to turn his strong Liverpool accent into an Australian / Irish one made me cringe. Director Phillippe Mora was taking a great risk of repeating this epic failure







but this time Hollywood actor Dennis Hopper was to star. The difference in quality (and accent) is dramatic.

Morgan was a bushranger who terrorised the wealthy squatters along the New South Wales – Victoria border. Like Kelly he was brought up hating the “traps” (the colonial police) and the wealthy. He turned to bushranging, was captured and imprisoned for twelve years, and came out a bitter man. He went back to bush-ranging but with the Police on both sides of the border hunting him his career was bound to be short. Like Ned Kelly he was ambushed and killed.

The film as usual starred an overseas actor but made up the other parts with Australians. Many went on to become well-known actors in their own right, like Frank Thring, Jack Thompson and David Gulpilil. It was well-made even though the camera and sound staff were as relatively inexperienced as the actors.

For once the extras are better than the usual Director’s Commentary. The interview with Hop-



per is particularly fun to watch as he discusses his attitudes to Australians, his alcohol problems and run-ins with the Victorian Police, and his acting style.

The film shows how much the Australian industry had matured after the schlock of the early 70s. Hopper’s character acting is a pleasant change from the rather wooden acting of many of the Australians, particularly later in the film when he is wandering the bush alone and friendless. Mora didn’t go overboard on the violence and blood. He concentrated on plot, character and action and Mad Dog Morgan foreshadowed what the Australian industry could do.

**Patrick 1978**  
**Ozploitation Series 3**  
**Umbrella Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

In the early days of Australian cinema there





was something of an obsession with naked women, now the censorship rules were relaxed. *Patrick* is a first class horror film that instead relied on a strong plot and brilliant acting.

Robert Thompson plays the title role. As a young boy Patrick killed his mother and her boyfriend by electrocuting them in their bath. He has been committed to a mental hospital ever since, and is catatonic. He is regarded as a human vegetable, but there is something else about Patrick. Deep in his inert body there is a powerful and often malicious intelligence capable of telekinesis – moving objects by the power of thought alone. Nobody suspects this, not even the nurses who must stay with him all the time to keep his eyes from drying out and to take care of his bodily functions.

He is assigned a new nurse, Kathy, (Susan Penhaligon gives a perfect performance) who talks to him as if he is conscious and generally treats him as a human. She even asks a psychologist friend to check him. Of course this is a breach of professional ethics and the matron, who regards Patrick as a waste of a valuable bed, nurse and resources, is not impressed. Nor is the hospital's Dr Roget (played brilliantly by Robert Helpmann). Any suggestion that he has missed something in Patrick's diagnosis is an insult to his integrity.

When Kathy is doing some typing one night in Patrick's room he manages to make contact



with her through the typewriter. At first she thinks the typewriter is playing up but Patrick's typed words soon start to make sense and she realises he is telekinetic. He tries to help her with her personal problems, in his own dangerous way. Her estranged husband is badly burnt. The psychologist friend is trapped in a disused lift.

Matters come to a head when the Doctor and matron decide that Patrick should die in a "power failure" that will stop his life support machinery thus removing the financial problem of keeping him alive. The matron goes to the basement to turn off the power. The Doctor prepares to inject Patrick with a lethal solution. Patrick fights back ruthlessly.

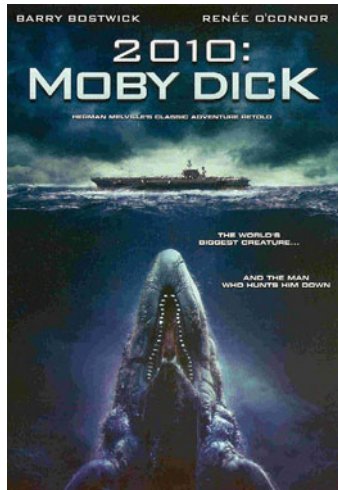
Kathy will have to confront Patrick's dark inner self to save the ones she loves, but can she beat Patrick? Patrick admits he is in love with her, but can he let her go? The film is dark and touches on areas of parapsychology that the medical fraternity would probably ignore. Thompson's dark, brooding eyes give him a tremendous sense of menace for someone who just lies there and doesn't speak a word during the film. This is undoubtedly the best horror film to come out of Australia.





**2010: Moby Dick**  
**Monster thriller**  
**The Asylum**  
**Peacock Films**  
**R4 DVD**

There seems to be a resurgence in the old genre of monster movies. Instead of monsters from outer space we now have megamonsters from the standard range of earth animals.



We have seen films on giant piranhas that can leap out of the water and explode on contact with buildings and giant sharks that eat submarines for breakfast. Giant octopus and crocodiles are discovered. Now in this story, VERY loosely based on Herman Melville's classic novel, we have a giant whale over 300 feet long.

The story has been brought up to date by having the whale discovered in the Arctic by a U.S. submarine. The whale eats the sub, naturally, and there are only two survivors. Years later one, Ahab, is now captain of a new atomic sub and the other survivor is one of his officers. Ahab is becoming obsessed with hunting down and killing the whale. Now he has the tool to do it with.

The sub takes on board ("kidnaps" could be a better word) Dr Michelle Herman and her assistant. She is an expert on whales and their talk and habits. She doesn't play a significant role in the film but does provide more eye candy than a bunch of sailors. They go whale hunting.



The whale meanwhile goes ship hunting. Ship after ship goes down and so does a naval helicopter. The whale eats another submarine that attacks it. Nobody believes in the giant whale. Official opinion is that Ahab has gone mad and is destroying the ships himself. There are no survivors so far to prove them wrong. As Ahab becomes more obsessed he chases the whale into an atoll lagoon where the final showdown will take place.

Despite the silly story, the bad CGI and the indifferent acting it is still a fun film to watch. Sure, it is quite unbelievable but so are all the other monster movies ever made. Enjoy it.

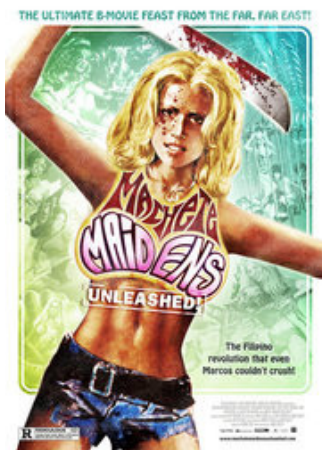






**Machete Maidens Unleashed**  
Documentary  
Umbrella  
Entertainment  
R4 DVD

Mark Hartley, producer of Not Quite Hollywood, has followed up his examination of the early Australian film industry by looking at the film industry in the Philippines. Unlike Australia the Philippines had a thriving industry producing cheap schlock films for local consumption. During the late 60s to the 80s the Philippines was producing over



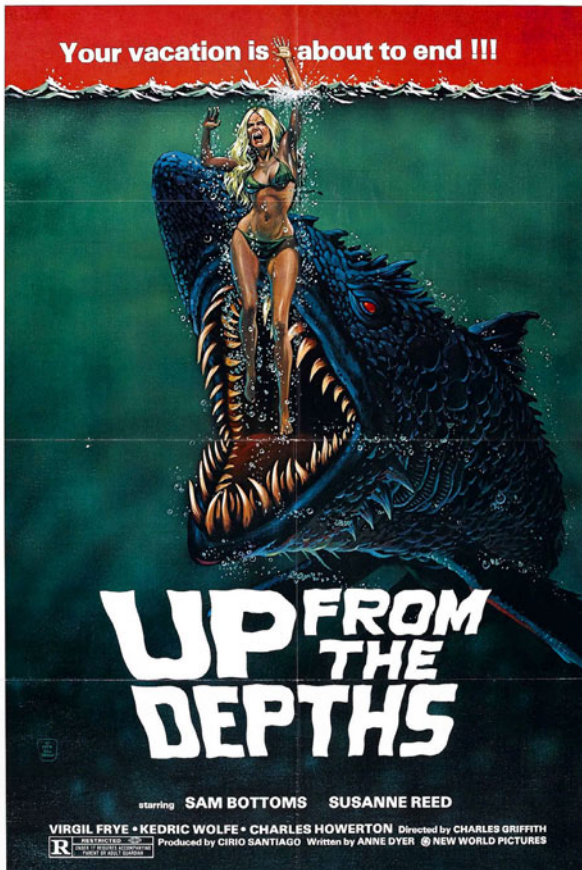
350 films per year. It was only natural that the American industry should move in and exploit the low wages, jungle scenery and complete lack of unions and safety requirements. Producers like Roger Corman moved their production across the Pacific where they produced their schlock even more cheaply. The content didn't change much, though.

*Karate-kicking midgets! Paper-mache monsters! Busty babes with blades!*

The films soon flooded U.S. drive-ins with cheap Filipino filler, although their origin was rarely published. They were sold simply as "jungle action".

We get some hilarious interviews with schlock moviemakers like Roger Corman, John Landis, Sid Haig, Joe Dante, and Eddie Romero. There are a lot of great background anecdotes from cast, crew and even critics. Their stories of filmmaking in the Philippines makes it sound more like making a war film. Everything was done quickly and on the cheap. Dialogue was kept to a minimum as "these weren't first rate





actors and they might get it wrong". Each scene was done in one shot in the best Corman style. If something went wrong the cameras just kept rolling. The directors relied on the editors to sort it out later. If a scene was particularly good it would be used again and again in other films. Corman went further, recycling entire films under new names until they finally sold. One interviewee remembers with glee seeing two late-night films that turned out to be the same film, with only the name changed.

*"We did not have stars so we had to exploit the subject matter" - Roger Corman*



The genres were the standard clichés – women in prison, war films, monsters wanting beautiful virgin sacrifices and so on. Even nurse films managed to be placed in exotic jungle surroundings. All had one thing in common – girls who were “overdeveloped and overexposed”.

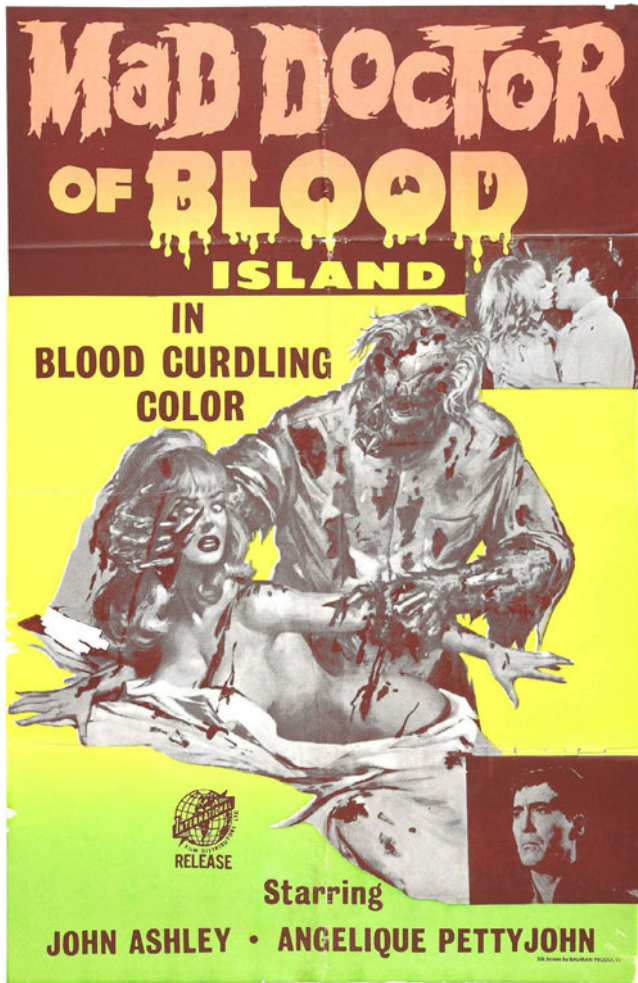
*"If we're selling sex it's the girl with the biggest breasts ...." – John Landis*

The titles were as lurid as the posters, as you would expect. Brides of Blood, Mad Doctor of Blood Island, Beast of the Yellow Knight, Women In Cages. The trailers were as schlock as the films. Covergirl Models : “It’s one of the best trailers we ever made – it doesn’t reflect the movie at all”. The trailer for Jackson County Jail used a helicopter explosion made years before for another film. The same clip was also used in other films. Corman still does this as an economy measure.

Surprisingly the films also featured strong women in masterful roles, a sign of the growing Women’s Lib movement. No matter how strong the female characters, though, they were all unencumbered by excess clothing.

It was a tough job making these films in the jungle. Facilities were often non-existent, filming hours were long, there were no dressing rooms or toilets. There were, however, bugs, snakes and anything that crawled, wriggled or stung. “Just like any snake I’ve ever known – can’t leave my tits alone”. There were some advantages for the viewer. In The Big Doll House, a women in prison film that was rewritten for the Philippines. “The women only got two showers a week and the lucky viewers got to see both of





them. “.

For the actresses who could survive the discomfort there was a career to be forged. Some, like Pam Grier, went on to a long life in films.

Bobbie Romero tended to make better quality films with a decent plot. Corman just wanted cheap exploitation films, but the two worked together for some years..

After a while, though, the films all started to look the same. Instead of making original films they just kept making the same film over and over. The industry even started spoofing its own films. The Big Birdcage was a takeoff of The Big Dollhouse. It flopped, proving that even the audiences had their limits. Corman changed to the Black Superheroine style with director Cirio Santiago and films like Savage, with Jeanne Bell starring as TNT Jackson. Firecracker (the screen's first erotic king fu classic) broke the mold with a white girl in the lead, but otherwise it was all the same. Karate-kicking women became the new feature, although they were still

largely bereft of clothing.

*“They Don’t Need Clothes To Strike A Pose”* as one film poster so eloquently put it.

Martial law under President Ferdinand Marcos caused some problems at first. Films based on plots of revolution against a cruel government had to be hastily rewritten. President Marcos appreciated the value of the film industry to his country. For the right film (for which the right people had been bribed) army units and weapons could be provided as needed. This made battle scenes more spectacular.

Other genres got the schlock treatment too. Pirates: *“Out of the steaming slave markets come the ravening sea savages ...”*

Monsters: a papier-mache sea monster that was so noseheavy that it dived to the bottom every time it went into the water.

Supermen: Bionic Boy versus a sort of mechanised fire-breathing dragon.

Sort-of martial arts / swordmanship films like The One-Armed Executioner, made for Corman by Bobby Suarez, another Filipino director.

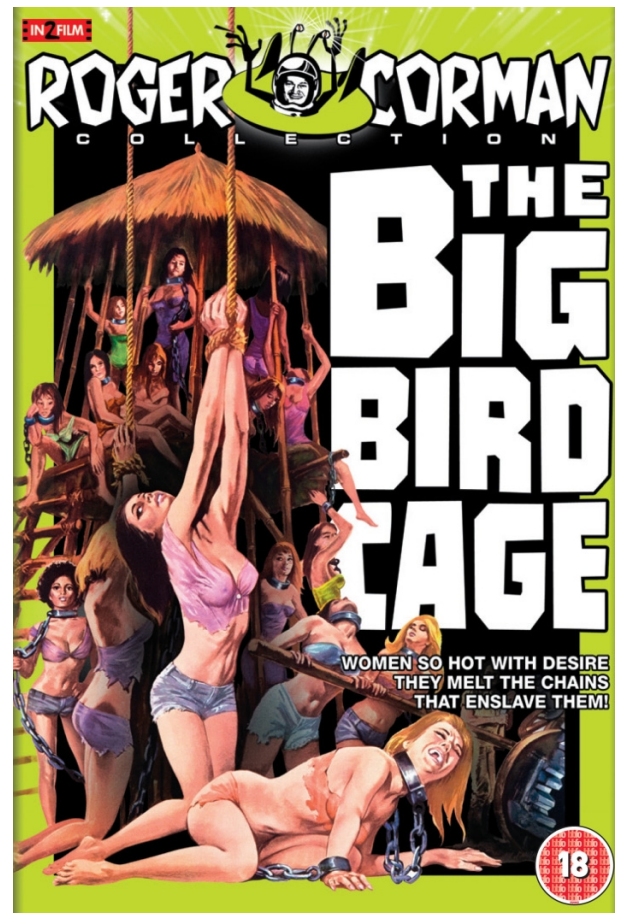






Bikers: The Losers (1970) – bikers in Cambodia rescuing CIA men.

Occasionally a big-budget mainstream film managed to surmount the schlock. Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* was the biggest film ever made in the Philippines.



Local viewers were still catered for. The most popular actor was the 3 foot 6 inches high Weng Weng, who usually played a secret agent in films for home consumption. He did everything James Bond did including getting the girls. He was really a parody of Hollywood heroes. For *Your Height Only* was not a great film, but Weng Weng was hugely popular in his own country.

It was fortunate that the local market still remained. In the face of pressure from the unions much filming and production work was moving back to the U.S. This also avoided the growing political unrest in the Philippines.

The set includes a range of interviews, reminiscences and background that is a great piece of entertainment in itself. The chapter of trailers for the films is unforgettable, as are the interviews with some of the producers. There seems to be no love lost between some of the producers. We even get a bonus of the feature film *Muthers*, perhaps an ideal example of the schlock. In spite of the exploitative bosom-loaded nature of the films they were still fun.



**Warbirds**  
**Schlock war /**  
**Monsters**  
**Sony Pictures Home**  
**Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

Calling this film "schlock" may be a little inaccurate, but what else could you call such a dodgy plot, dodgy acting and more holes than a colander? The annoying part is that despite these weaknesses it's actually pretty good. If you were a Godzilla fan this will be your sort of film.

A group of women civilian ferry pilots take a new B29 bomber to Hawaii. From there it will be ferried on to a combat unit somewhere in the Pacific. The Air Force has other ideas. They are to ferry a secret cargo on a secret mission to Tinian island. A detachment of soldiers led by an arrogant Colonel will guard the cargo. En route they are downed on an unknown island after their aircraft is damaged by some sort of huge flying lizard.

As well as lots of flying lizards the island also has a small detachment of Japanese, all that is left of a Japanese Air Force contingent that manned a fighter base there. The lizards have been feeding well. The two groups must cooperate if they are to get the bomber off the island



before the lizards pick them off. While the Japanese repair the damaged engine the Americans go to the beach to get drums of fuel from a Japanese fuel dump. The beach is, of course, the ones the lizards are using, so we lose more Americans.

The girls know that if they get the heavy bomber off the ground it will be a slow, easy target for the lizards. Two girls volunteer to fly escort in the Japanese Zero fighters on the airfield. Even though they are civilian bomber pilots, flying a high speed foreign fighter apparently presents no difficulties. They are, after all, Americans. The bomber takes off, the lizards attack, a few more Americans are lost. Now we find out what the secret cargo is, as if anyone doesn't know by now.

The plot is, as mentioned, unlikely but the CGI is brilliant. The acting is almost over the top, especially by Brian Krause playing the Colonel, but only "almost". I finished up wishing that the lizards would get him, but I was disappointed. The cinematography and sound are first class and altogether it's a very watchable film. It was originally made for the Sci Fi Channel, but this DVD should give it a wider audience. It was probably made on a limited budget but that doesn't show. For cheap thrills, try this one.





**Deadly Waters: The Hidden World of Somalia's Pirates**  
**Jay Bahadur**  
**Scribe (2011)**

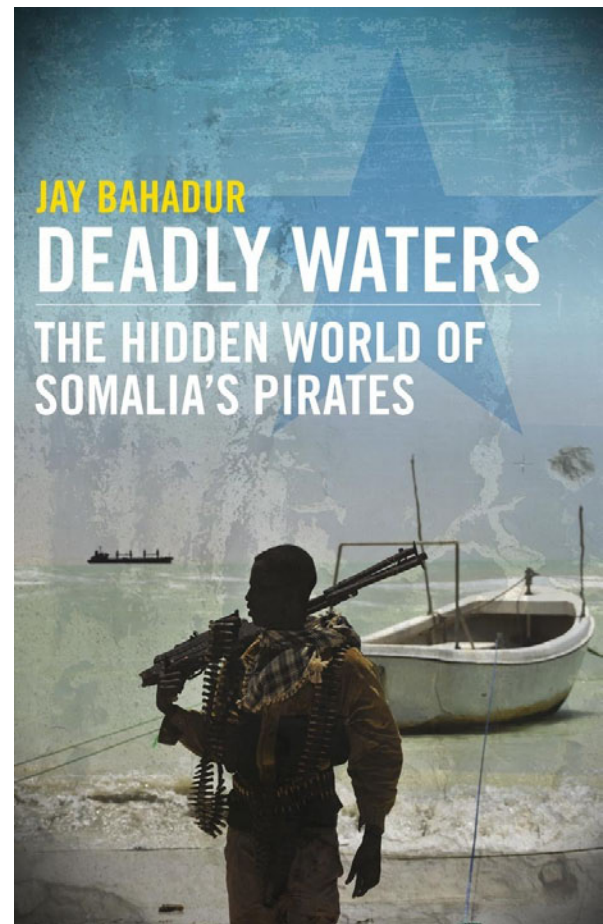
Around five years ago a new pirate area developed off the wartorn Somalia coast. More correctly it was based on a breakaway province of Somalia called Puntland, an unruly desperately poor province riddled by corruption and lack of any administration system. One major reason for the chaos is the system of clans in Puntland. How can the Somali troops enter the province to restore order when they will be fighting their cousins? Bahadur mentions the clan system frequently in connection with the region's many problems.

Bahadur entered the province under the rather shaky protection of a local military man with the vital clan connections. They visited many of the pirates (they are quite well known in Puntland) but always under the protection of armed men. The book is based mostly on his interviews with the pirate leaders, who have now become more like businessmen than primitive pirates. It is hard to describe the pirates' reaction to his questions as some seem to genuinely believe what they are saying, even though the facts suggest otherwise.

The first lie Bahadur had to investigate was their claim that they had been driven to piracy by the destruction of their fishing grounds by foreign trawlers. There is some truth in this. Fishing was Puntland's only practical export industry but the loss of fish may be equally due to the illegal dumping of toxic and radioactive waste off the coast. Most of Puntland's fishing fleet stayed close in to the coast. Trawling would not have affected the fishing grounds much but the chemicals would. Local people will not eat local fish, fearing poisoning and deformities.

A licensing system was introduced for foreign inshore fishing vessels but the administrators were so corrupt that it was pointless. The funds were to be used to finance a Coastguard but when the wages stopped coming the officers simply turned to piracy themselves.

The reaction of the Puntlanders was to turn to piracy against the foreign fishing boats, then against foreign ships generally. Or so they



claim. They bought fast launches and AK47s. When the fishing ships started to arm themselves the pirates invested in old Russian anti-aircraft guns and the arms race escalated.

Another lie Bahadur regularly encountered was the assertion that the pirate leaders did not make much money out of each raid after they paid for wages, fuel costs and weapons. Many of the leaders live in rich houses ("it is not mine, it is my wife's") and make money by loaning the new pirates the funds to get each raid started. It can take months to get a ransom through and the financier must cover many of the costs while they wait for settlement. The piracy is not, as was frequently asserted, the work of an international cartel. Most of the lower level pirates are indeed poor because they waste their money on khat (the local narcotic drug, a bit like the Andean coca leaf) and a 4WD that is the status symbol in Puntland.

The khat trade is mostly serviced by next-door neighbour Kenya. Puntland is now a net exporter of money because of the trade. Bahadur goes into a lot of detail about khat and even tried the drug himself to win favour with the pi-



rates he wanted to interview. Arriving at a meeting with a few bags of khat was a surefire way to relax the meeting.

The pirates are hard to control on land due to the clan structure already mentioned. They are not full-time, preferring to work only when they want a new 4WD or the money for khat runs out. There is no local police force to intervene (not enough money) and the army will not come into the area.

The international opposition to piracy is disorganised and largely ineffective and Bahadur runs through some of the obstacles to stopping piracy. The U.N. seems incapable of a concerted effective reaction. The worldwide

laws regarding piracy are dreadfully out of date. The shipping companies prefer to pay a couple of million dollars in ransom rather than try to take back their ships. Generally the crews are treated fairly well so there is little humanitarian reason to intervene. Even if you capture pirates what do you do with them? In a patchwork set of new laws the pirates are handed over to Kenya for trial and imprisonment but Kenya only has one prison that is now desperately overcrowded. The U.N. will build Kenya a new prison but will do nothing to stop the khat trade or help Puntland with new industries.

Because Bahadur's evidence is first hand it carries a lot more weight than all the paperwork generated by other sources. In spite of the conflicts and even outright lies, the people of Puntland still have a serious problem that has led to piracy. The world seems to be accepting that piracy in the area is an overhead that must simply be tolerated. Would it not be wiser to provide a better way for the Puntlanders to generate income?

The appendices contain much useful information including a guide to Puntland's clan system. There is a timeline charting the growth of piracy. A further appendix provides the references Bahadur uses to support his statements.

He has done an excellent job of putting a growing problem area under the microscope in a detailed way that is as easy to follow for the layman as for the academic.



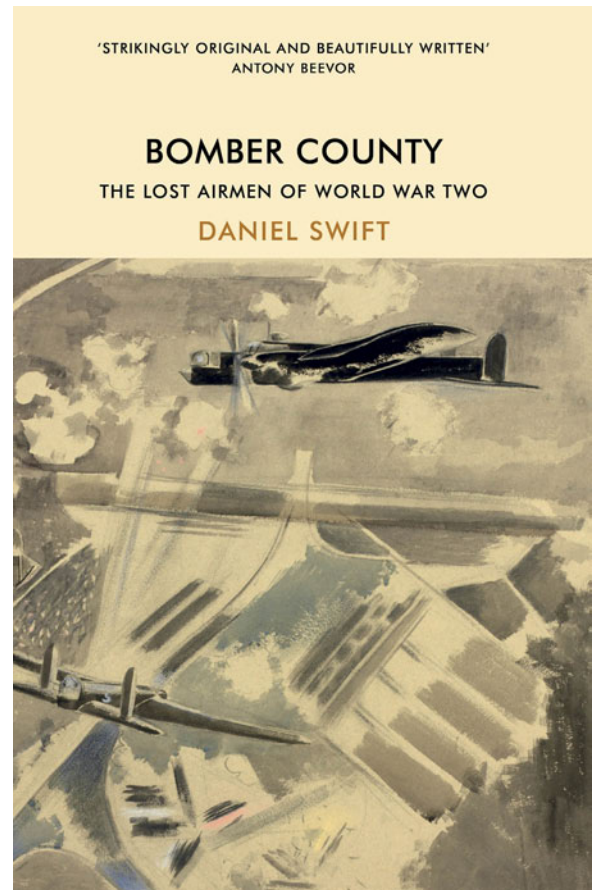


**Bomber County:  
The Lost Airmen of World War Two  
Daniel Swift  
Hamish Hamilton  
Penguin Books (2011)**

Lincolnshire was nicknamed "Bomber County" during World War II because of the many airfields built there during the war. From these airfields, Daniel Swift's grandfather flew many missions into Europe. He died on the return leg of a bombing raid when his bomber was intercepted by a German night fighter and shot down into the Dutch IJsselmeer in 1943.

Swift has tried to reconstruct his grandfather's career and experiences from family documents, official records, and the notes and logbooks of the other bomber pilots.

The book is a little confused in that it contains a parallel storyline where Swift tries to disprove the statement that World War II produced none of the great poetry or literature of World War I. This is understandable as he is an English Literature teacher and well qualified to make the comparison, but it makes it hard for the reader to follow the narrative of his grandfather when a chunk of poetry intrudes. The book was originally released as *Bomber County: The Poetry of a Lost Pilot's War*.



This was possibly a more accurate description as Swift often provides the life story of the poets rather than the bombers.

He writes a detective story as he pieces together the little bits and pieces of his grandfather's history, from his prewar interest in flying to the discovery of his body washed up on the Dutch shore in 1943 a week after his aircraft and crew disappeared. The efforts of the Dutch people to honour the men who died over their country is simply incredible. They estimate that



there are still about 1500 aircraft lost in the waters around the country. Their efforts at recovery and identification are well detailed in the documentary *One Of Our Aircraft Is No Longer Missing*. It would have been appropriate to include more detail on the recovery and identification efforts.

There is a tremendous amount of detail in the story and this serves to give a wider and more accurate picture of the dangers and the boredom in the life of a bomber crew. Much of the detail has been taken from the writings and records of other pilots, but Swift is probably quite correct in assuming that the experience of one echoes the experience of the others. He includes interviews with surviving crew members and with the victims of the bombing. He also mentions the reasons for and the ultimate benefits of the saturation bombing and firebombing of major cities, an area often forgotten. Analysis after the war showed that civilians in lightly bombed cities were just as demoralised as the victims in, say, Dresden. This raises the question of whether the maximum bombing effort and the loss of lives on both sides was really worth it. Swift reflects on what the typical crewman's reaction may have been had these results been known during the bombing campaign.

The victims of the London Blitz also receive due consideration. Given the German analysis it may explain why the Londoners stoically put up with the nightly bombings for so long – they simply reached the point where they couldn't change it so they just put up with it. Morale can only sink so far. The writings he uses to illustrate this section sometimes seem a little divorced from reality.

Although I thought the poetry and history would each stand on their own and seem a bit awkward when combined, Swift has given us a wide range of viewpoints from his meticulous research. Rather than a book on bomber poetry, I felt it worked better as a history of the flying life of a typical bomber pilot and those people his work affected. The poetry of which Swift is so fond is often a little clumsy, but mostly it serves to illustrate the story. The book is not so much a history as a very personal insight on the pilots and crew, of whom his grandfather was a typical example.



**The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo**  
**Stieg Larsson**  
**Qercus**

Also in the series:

**The Girl Who Played With Fire**  
**The Girl Who Kicked The Hornet's Nest**

The Millenium series, as these three books are known, is a chilling, dark expose of the world of sexual violence against women in Sweden.

The author died in 2004 but it is appropriate to note that his alternate title was "*Men Who Hate Women*".

Larson also looked at the corrupt world of big Swedish capitalists and the shoddy investigative reporting that keeps letting them get away with it. As a reporter himself he wrote from experience. He looks at just how responsible the Swedish institutions like the police and government are for turning a victim into a criminal.





Larson weaves these themes into detective stories but the underlying horror of the treatment of women is a strong point in each book.

Lisbeth Salander is a girl in her twenties who has spent much of her life since she was twelve in a mental institution. Her history goes back to her schooldays when she beat up a bully who kept taunting her at school. When she fought back she was regarded as the villain by the school staff and earned a reputation for violence.

Her mother was the sexual plaything of a brutal, violent man and she has had two daughters to him, Lisbeth and a sister. One night he bashed her so savagely that she had to be put in a home under constant medical care, suffering from brain damage. Strangely the police did nothing about it (we find out why later in the series).

Salander's response was to throw a petrol bomb into her father's car. His severe burns caused him to lose a foot and he hates Salander. The lonely twelve year old girl was institutionalised and abused by Peter Teleborian, a cruel psychologist, over a period of years before

her release into the guardianship of an elderly solicitor, Palmgren. She had now developed such a mistrust of authority figures that she simply wouldn't speak to them, but with patience and kind concern Palmgren has come to establish a sort of trust with her.

When Palmgren has a stroke Salander is placed under the guardianship of Nils Bjurman, a thoroughly nasty lawyer who rapes and mistreats Salander as well as other young girls under his control. Her revenge on him is rather poetic and appropriate, but will come back to haunt her.

She has one bright spot in her life. She is a superb computer hacker. She was employed part-time by Milton Security on a contract basis. The manager of Milton still could not break through her reserve, but like Palmgren she came to trust him – a little.

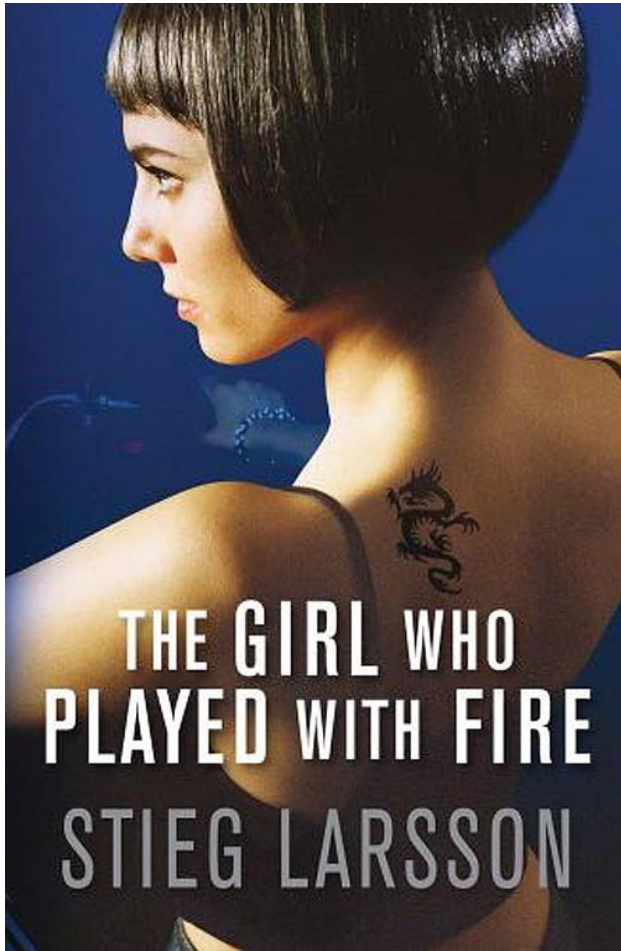
In a separate matter a journalist, Mikael Blomkvist, has published the corrupt dealings of a well known businessman, Wennerstrom. Wennerstrom has taken Mikael to court for slander and none of Mikael's evidence can now be corroborated. It appears that he has been set up with false information, but he is now facing a short prison sentence and a fine that will bankrupt Millenium, the magazine he works for.

While he waits for his prison term to come up in Sweden's overloaded prisons he accepts a job for elderly retired businessman Henrik Vanger. Vanger's daughter disappeared some thirty years ago and he has become obsessed with finding out what happened to her.

The body was never found. Mikael is to go through all the evidence one more time and see if he can work out what happened. As a further enticement Vanger offers Mikael details of Wennerstrom's dirty deals and how he pulled them off and got away with it.

Vanger has hired Salander to dig into Wennerstrom's history so the two of them meet. Mikael needs more information from the computer records of the time and is astounded when he finds out about Salander's hacking ability.

Mikael and Salander find inconsistencies in the information held by the police. The Vanger family is a group of hostile misfits and as Mikael



gets closer to the truth he realises a family member must have been involved in the girl's disappearance. What he finds is horrifying. It involves the systematic kidnapping, rape and torture of young women over a very long period. It almost costs him his life.

### **The Girl Who Played With Fire**

In the second book Salander is enjoying her semi-independence from Bjurman. She is still theoretically under his guardianship but she is confident that he will not be playing any more nasty tricks on her following the rough justice she meted out to him.

She has managed to hack Wennerstrom's secret bank accounts before Mikael's new revelations crashed his business spectacularly. Salander transferred a large amount of Wennerstrom's illegal money to her own accounts, and she is now touring around the world on the proceeds.

Mikael is back at work at Millenium. One of the young reporters is working on an expose of the

sex trade involving Russian girls. His article will implicate judges, policemen and others in power. The main racket seems to be run by a mysterious man named Zala.

The reporter's girlfriend is also doing a thesis on the subject of female abuse in Sweden. He gets too close to the truth and he and his girlfriend are murdered. So is Nils Bjurman, Salander's guardian. Since she seems to have something in common with each victim and she is being regarded as the murderer.

A corrupt policeman and an incompetent Prosecutor are leaking information to their media contacts suggesting that Salander is a violent Satan-worshipping prostitute as well as a killer. Once again she is being mistreated by the very people who are supposed to be protecting her. As the murder toll mounts she is hunted throughout Sweden.

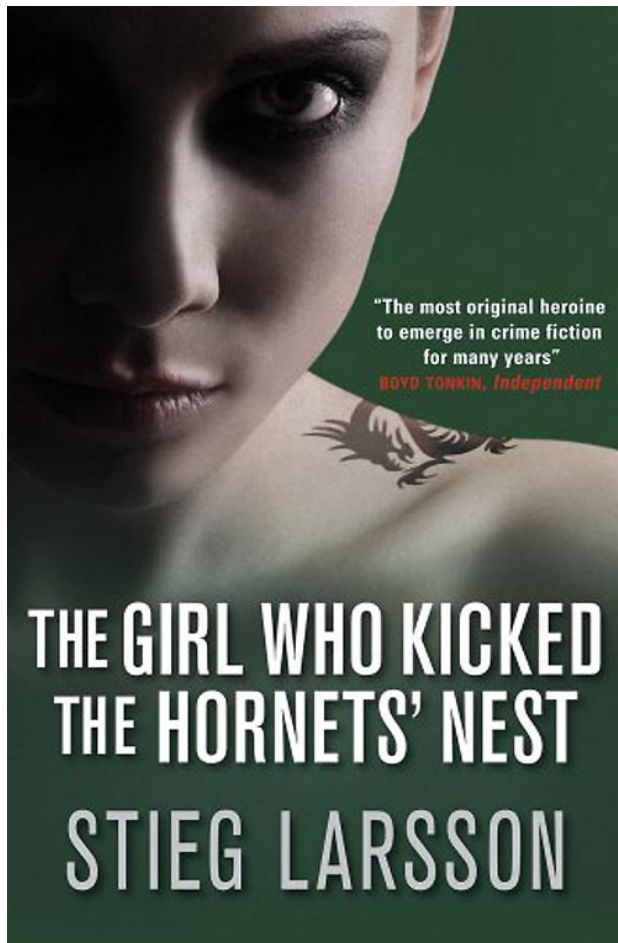
Salander starts investigating the murders and tracking the potential suspects in the only way she can – by using her computer hacking skills. Between her and Mikael they gradually uncover a horrifying story of murders and cover-ups going into the higher reaches of Sweden's police and security organisations.

There are honest police, however, and Inspector Bublanski is prepared to look for proof or otherwise. The same cannot be said of some of his policemen who are ardent women-haters and some of whom are actively involved in the sex slave racket. Even retired officers are coming out to plot against Salander.

The rights of one antisocial girl are unimportant compared to what these faceless men see as a greater good. They consider themselves above the law in this matter.

The three separate investigations come together and the finale is bloody and gruesome. Around Salander more people are dying and it is only her survival skills that keep her going. We find out who Zala really is and get an indication of why he seems immune to police investigation. There is a direct link to Salander's past. The finale is bloody and savage.





### The Girl Who Kicked The Hornets' Nest

The third book in the series is more of a forensic legal treatise. Salander is in hospital with severe injuries following the climax of the previous novel. She was shot in the head and shoulder by Zala and is under police guard. As soon as the doctor discharges her she will be moved to prison to face charges of murder.

There are a number of people who are working on her behalf. Now her situation is better known Mikael's sister is going to represent her in court.

Although she is not a criminal lawyer she seems suited to the role as she is a leading campaigner for womens' rights. She even manages to gain Salander's grudging trust after a while. The doctor who saved her life finds Salander fascinating and Salander comes to trust him as well. He is holding off the police until she is ready to go to prison.

The delay is because Mikael has arranged to smuggle a small computer in to her via the doc-

tor and she is indulging in her favourite hobby – hacking the computers of her enemies. Inspector Bublanski is amazed at the case being set up against her by high-ranking people and is now seriously investigating a case for her innocence. Even her old guardian, Palmgren, is coming out of his nursing home to help her.

Against them is a small group of high-ranking government officers who have their own reasons for keeping her in a mental institution, under the control of their pet psychiatrist Peter Teleborian. Once again it looks like Salander is going to have her rights abused simply because she is a woman in the wrong place and therefore a target for male abuse of her rights.

The bulk of the book is about the steady plodding investigations, the interference with the investigation from the highest levels, and finally the courtroom where Salander's guilt or innocence will be decided. Her enemies cannot afford to have her acquitted.

They resort to murder, attempted murder, planting "evidence" and further smears in the media to discredit her and make her look like the insane murderer they have depicted.

It is astounding that Larsson managed to get so many genres into the one story, but he has done it well. There are some holes in the plot and had he lived Larsson may have corrected these, but they are minor. With his background as a journalist Larsson managed to give us a strong picture of the publishing industry, so important to the plot in a story like this. His description of the police procedures is likewise thorough and we finish the books feeling that we have learnt something.

All his major characters have strongly drawn personalities. Often those personalities are due to some unrevealed facet that will only become evident further on in the story. The long and carefully constructed plots draw out the tension, but it is the constant thread of abuse of women that holds the plots together and introduces the elements of terror that make it a more powerful story.

The books have now been made into films, but I haven't seen them yet. I look forward to them.

The film was acquired for theatrical and home video release by arthouse distributor Music Box Films. It had its American premiere on March 6, 2010 at the Miami Film Festival titled *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.

*Played with Fire* and *Hornets' Nest* were re-released in the United States in 2010 by Music Box Films.

Releases in the UK and Europe followed, there are details on an Australian release as yet.

**Matched**  
**Ally Condie**  
**Razor Bill**  
**Penguin 2010**

This book seems to be aimed at teenage readers more than an adult audience but it is so good that even at my somewhat advanced years I thoroughly enjoyed it. Ally Condie has mixed elements of teenage love, science fiction and rebellion into a slowly developed but fascinating story. With the entire book to fit the story into she is able to produce truly three-dimensional characters set against the not-too-futuristic background of an overbearing bureaucracy.

As the story opens we get a look at the future world. It is run by a faceless body of Officers and Officials. They maintain a peaceful life for the citizens by rigidly controlling EVERYTHING – food, nutrition, education, communications, housing.

In the interests (so the citizens are told) of improving efficiency to maintain their comfortable lifestyles everything has been reduced to a minimum – the 100 poems, 100 paintings and so on, all approved by the Officials. School students are not taught to write.

All communications go through a network of ports where they can be checked for what we would call political correctness. The Officials ask the citizens to trust them and for those who obey the reward is a stable, comfortable life. For the others there are punishments available, even in this perfect society.

Cassia has now reached one of the milestones of her life. She is to attend a banquet where she will be Matched. The Society “sorts” a partner for each young person, usually in another area. She

‘Beautifully written with characters that stayed with me long after the final page’  
MELINA MARCHETTA, author of *Looking for Alibrandi*



is surprisingly matched with Xander, a young man from her own school. They have been close friends for years. This local matching is not unheard of but is uncommon. The Sorters who decide the matches rarely make a mistake like this.

She is given a datacard with Xander's details to study, and details of the next moves to make in the official Courtship rituals. When she inserts the card into her port at home she is astounded to see, not Xander, but another schoolfriend, Ky.

Because of an Infraction committed by Ky's parents he is not supposed to be in the pool to be matched. The next day the datacard is taken from Cassia by an Official and replaced with another one with Xander's details. She and Xander follow the approved procedures, but she can't get Ky out of her mind.

The next milestone in her life is the death of her beloved grandfather. Elderly people die at 80.





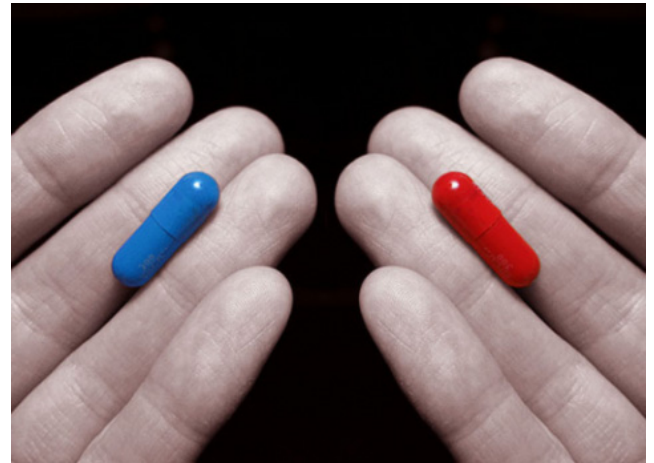
This, say the Officials, is to reduce the onset of senility and to allow them to die with dignity.

Grandfather gives her an old pre-Society compact and her brother gets Grandfather's old watch. Such Artifacts are not officially disapproved of but there is a limit of one Artifact per person. This is so citizens do not become "confused" by being overly attached to the past and its mistakes. There are many of these Artifacts held by people in secrecy – is it possible that a little bit of rebellion against the petty rules and pointless decisions is growing?

Cassia's father and mother certainly indulge in a little bit of quiet rebellion when they can. There are other signs that rebellion is growing, too, not least that Cassia is now in love with both Xander and Ky. They must hide this from the Officials. If she is found out by the ever-present Officials it will mean an Infraction against her and reprisals against her family. Gradually Cassia is leaving behind her model citizen role.

"But I don't want to be defined by their choices"

Her next milestone is to be assigned a job. She is a good Sorter, seeing patterns and trends in large groups of people. It can be an important job. Sorters have in the past managed to pre-



vent cancer by looking for the cancer gene in people and breeding it out of the population. People may be assigned jobs on the basis of Cassia's sorting as well as their past history of obedience to Society's rules.

Cassia's rebellion is growing stronger. The constant little pinpricks of a blind Society are now standing out more to her. Her neighbourhood's leafy peacefulness is ruined when workers chop down all the trees in her street – they are "inefficient" because they drop leaves and are not an even height. Ky has failed a sort in his workplace and is to be sent to fight in an unannounced war on one of the province's borders. The Officials who take him away in handcuffs are confronted by the local people but the citizens' disobedience is soon crushed.

They are required to take a red pill that will erase their memories of the last twenty four hours of rebellion and leave them once again docile. Finally Cassia and her family are reassigned to an Outer Province farming community as punishment for their collective infractions. Cassia is now closer to Ky, who is fighting in the same area, and she is less under the influence of the Society.

*"Because it's about making our own choices ....That's the point, isn't it?"*

As a story about rebellion against a mindless society, this book is first class. Even as a teenage love story it's not too bad. Cassia is strongly drawn and her change from compliant citizen to teenage rebel is built up in little pieces that make the process quite credible. We must now wait for the sequel, "Crossed", due for release in November. Disney has secured the book rights for a possible film.

**36th Precinct**  
**France**  
**R1**  
**Palisades**  
**Tartan**

*French with English  
Subtitles*

Although this is a classic good cop – bad cop film, it is a style that is still popular because of its action content. If it's not to look too old-fashioned the film must include a credible plot and generally good actors. 36th Precinct does this. The 36th Precinct is the 36th arrondissement of Paris. Its cops are a mixture of good and bad. The film centres around two of them, Leo Vricks and Denis Klein. The Commissioner is retiring soon and the two are at loggerheads over who will get his job. Vricks is the quiet, effective one and is the Commissioner's pick. Klein, equal in seniority, is the rough, hard man who will beat a confession out of a suspect. Both men have their followers. The Commissioner knows this and must find some way to separate the two.

This conflict between two leading characters is fairly conventional in many police films but here it is done with a certain subdued style rather



than the usual American nose-to-nose confrontation. It seems to work better in the French film.

A gang is targeting armoured cars in the area. Their attacks are sudden, violent and usually deadly. They are well armed and well prepared. Whichever officer gets the gang will get the nomination for promotion. Vricks gets a tipoff call from a prisoner, Silian, on weekend release and they meet that night. The purpose of the meeting, from Vricks' point of view, is to get the tipoff but it is a setup. Silian executes a man who informed on him and Vricks is now compromised. He decides to say nothing and act on the tipoff about where the armoured car criminals are staying. It appears Vricks has a flaw, ambition, himself. A raid is planned. It goes badly and fatally wrong when Klein reveals himself to the criminals and a gunfight ensues.







Vrinks is in disgrace, held responsible for the death of a colleague and for covering up the execution by Silian. He is charged for his actions and found guilty.

Eight years later, Vrinks is out of prison. His wife is dead, killed in a botched intercept of Silian by Klein. Klein is now in charge and is intent on covering his tracks. Vrinks is intent on revealing Klein as the killer of his wife. With few friends left this will be a hard job and will run against all the principles he learnt as a policeman.

In a film full of good actors two stand out. Gerard Depardieu is perfect as Klein, getting

deeper into the murk of a dishonest cop. Olivier Marchal plays Vrinks with a grim determination that suits the character.

On its release in 2004 the film was nominated for nine Cesar Awards (France's equivalent of the Oscars). Most of these were for Best Actor and the supporting roles. This is quite an accolade considering the quality of French drama.

The DVD has a number of extras from the usual "The Making Of ..." to selection of weapons for the film. .



## The Adjustment Bureau Universal R1 DVD

The Adjustment Bureau is a startling and original science fiction film based on the "Adjustment Team" by eccentric sci-fi author Philip K. Dick. The central question the film poses is whether we control our own destiny and this is explored in an innovative and creative manner. Matt Damon plays David Norris, an up and coming politician on a career trajectory to the Whitehouse. Everything seems to be working perfectly to get him to his goal right on schedule, but perhaps it is all a bit too perfect.

One day Norris arrives earlier to work than expected and finds strange workers engineering the reality of his world, his co-workers are frozen in time and their minds are being manipulated. It is quite a amazing scene and makes trhe crossroads between the build-up of the movie to the true meat of the film.

The truth, it seems, is that the behind the veil of



everyday life are "adjusters", beings who manipulate mankind to achieve certain ends. While their goals are for man's benefits their methods can be brutal even fatal.

As the film progresses we come to understand that these adjusters have been working throughout mankind's history and each time they have given man "free reign" disaster has resulted. The Chairman would prefer mankind understand and use their free will but each time mankind has had the opportunity to use it they have created dark ages, wars and catastrophes, now mankind has put the globe at risk.

The film centres on the battle between the adjusters and Norris over Elise. He loves her and wishes to share his life with her, they have decided he will be president and she a great dancer. They have done everything to manipu-







late his life so he can become president including being involved in the death of his father and the suicide of his brother. They warn him that if he tells anyone about them they will wipe his memory and he will end up a vegetable.

The conflict becomes more and more extreme and finally Norris faces the adjusters on their own turf. The film is made more interesting by the presence of “doorways” - these are openings from one portal of physical space to another by the use of an adjusters hat. Norris is able to use them with the help of a sympathetic adjuster, Harry Mitchell, bringing the story to an powerful climax.

Philip K. Dick had a great interest in Gnosticism and the depiction of angels and adjusters and the spirit world as a vast bureaucracy has much in common with early Gnostic traditions. Norris never meets the “Chairman” who in gnostic theology would be the creator of the world who is not necessarily seen as God but as a demi-god of unknown character.

In many ways this is reflected throughout the film as you wonder about the morality of the adjusters and what they are doing. Harry as the rebellious adjuster or angel resonances with the Gnostic view that the angel who rebelled against heaven was a good rather than evil character helping bring free will to man a bit like Prometheus bringing fire own from the heavens. Harry seems to be working against the Chairman but finally as seen as representing a unique voice among the adjusters encouraging free will.



The ending is a little philosophically simplistic arguing that the “chairman” wishes mankind to think for themselves and take control of the reigns taking free will for themselves. But the film on a whole works well and avoid too many clichés. For a film filled with religious, philosophical and esoteric themes it does incredibly well and communicates a lot more smoothly than similar films such as *Inception*.

This is certainly an original work of science fiction which has a highly idiosyncratic plot with some great special effects. The character development is excellent from Norris and Elise to Harry as the rebellious angel, in this case one who works in the service of good. The adjusters are superbly bureaucratic and the spirit world as a giant office block filled with accountants and officer workers is a nice twist. In an industry filled with a lot of films with similar plots and an over reliance on special effects this is a real joy..



**Betrayal**  
Eagle  
Entertainment  
R4 DVD

*German with  
English subtitles*

When Germany conquered Norway in World War II it spent a lot of money developing the country's infrastructure and strengthening its defences. There were profiteers on both sides and it is these that the film deals with.

Tor Lindblom is a nightclub owner who provides the Germans with luxury goods and services from the black market. In many ways his club resembles a crime den of the American Prohibition era with its rich and influential men making their deals. Is he truly betraying his country if he makes money out of the enemy? His partner in crime is SS Major Kruger, a German who is skimming money from the huge construction budgets. Kruger is definitely betraying his country. He is Eva's ex-boyfriend and is spying on her out of jealousy.

Eva is a singer at the club. She has a part-time day job at Gestapo headquarters as a clerk. She is also a British agent. Somewhat amoral, she has three lovers unknowingly providing information to her. She gives the information to her ex-boyfriend, another British agent, to get it to London.

A Dr Walter is sent to audit Kruger's books, suspecting Kruger is making huge profits for him-



self. The game is up.

Finally the pressures build and Kruger is forced to act to cover himself. One by one the conspirators are shot and Eva realises it is time to get out. The film finally switches into full speed in her desperate race for the border with Kruger in hot pursuit.

Although the film is slow during the first half it manages to show the dangerous and slow methods of gathering intelligence in a hostile country. I would have liked a little more action here, but I can see why director Haakon Gunderson chose to proceed with care. Perhaps he could have used the time to develop the characters a little further, but since each of them is trying to hide their real motives what character should he have shown? It is hard to feel sympathy for any of the players. All are betraying their country or their friends, a point that is made laboriously during the slow moving first half of the film.

Gunderson makes up for the dark, shadowy nighttime scenes of the first part with a rather incongruous escape through the beautiful countryside. Death and betrayal against such a lovely background is definitely a surprise.

I suppose I must mention that the part of Eva is played by Lene Nystrom, lead singer of Aqua. Her voice is perfect for the part but I kept waiting for her to burst into a chorus of "I'm a Barbie girl". Mercifully it didn't happen.

You are going to love or hate this film. Its subtlety will not be to everybody's liking.





## Black Death Cinema Release 2011

*Black Death* is a fascinating journey into darkness set during the period of the black plague. The film opens as Osmund, a young monk, finds himself pulled between the Church and the love of a young woman. He convinces Averill to leave town as the black plague spreads and she tells him she will wait five days in the forest by a cross for him to join her.



When Ulric, an emissary from the bishop arrives at the monastery asking for a guide to lead them into the swamps trying to locate an isolated village free from the plague Osmund jumps at the chance to "kill two birds with one stone" and reunite with his love. However all is not as it seems, Ulric actually believes that the village is under the control of demons and a necromancer and aims to catch this sorcerer and kill those under his or her spell.

As they travel through the countryside the experience of the black death is powerfully portrayed, from the penitents punishing themselves to the piles of rotting bodies. This is a visceral film, visually arresting and atmospheric. The journey to the village is just as significant as what happens when they arrive as the violence and savagery of the so-called Christian warriors becomes all too obvious.

As they stop for the night Osmund flies to where Avril is meant to meet him and finds what seems to be her dead body, this leads to an almighty battle between the Christian warriors and local forest bandits with some great one on one fighting and lots of bloodshed.

The village is beautifully portrayed, at first it seems like a strange place where Christi-



anity does not exist and the plague has not touched. The early scenes have a bit of "The Wicker Man" feel about them but set in a much earlier period. The Church is derelict and pagan customs abound.

The Christians are invited as guests and treated with hospitality but as their intentions become obvious things become nasty. They are drugged and prepared for sacrifice to the god of the marsh to whom the High Priestess of the village claims offers them protection from the plague. The first knights are killed by crucifixion, but Osmund is given a chance to be free if he renounces his faith.

This is where the story becomes an interesting investigation of trickery and sorcery. While the High Priestess/Necromancer claims she can raise the dead she actually simply has a great mastery of herbs and potions and uses them to great effect. While Osmund believes Averill was killed in the forest and that the necromancer brought her back from the dead she was actually healed and drugged for effect.





Things goes horribly wrong as he is convinced she is in purgatory and her soul is locked in her body and kills her. When it comes Ulric's turn to die, he is prepared to be torn between horses, just before the final act he is found to have the plague and it spreads to the village. It seems that sorcery or the marsh gods have not protected them but simply their cleanliness and isolation.

This fascinating exploration of paganism, rationalism and extreme Christian missionary violence



is intelligent and intriguing. The pagan village is ultimately a peaceful community living by its own rules only killing outsiders when it has too. The trickery of the High Priestess has much in common with the old shamanic traditions where the use of herbs, potions, trances and trickery was used for psychological effect. The comparison between the peaceful and occasionally violent pagans who do not believe in heaven or hell, enjoy the flesh and accept life as it is with the ruthless Christians is powerfully portrayed. This becomes even more powerful in the ending. As the necromancer escapes, her offside is taken in as the sorcerer to be punished (someone must die for what happened!) and young Osmund is returned to his monastery. The twist is that Osmund does not become a reflective young monk having learnt from his experiences but a violent monster. He now sees the face of the necromancer everywhere and hunts her throughout his life killing vast numbers of supposed witches (or more likely innocent women). The ending is poignant and a reflection on the hatred that drove the witch trials.

This is a fascinating film with many plot twists, excellent cinematography and through provoking ideas.







**Catfish**  
**Mystery**  
**Hopscotch**  
**Entertainment**  
**R4**

With all the attention on Internet abuse this is a timely film. Although it is made as a documentary, there have been cries that it is a fake. Only the producers know, but even if it is a fake it is no less chilling.

Yaniv (Nev) Schulman is a New York photographer. Many of his photos are published and one day he receives in the mail a painting based on one of his photos. It is from Abby, an eight year



old girl in a northern state. Nev is fascinated and amazed by the quality of her work. The two strike up a friendship on Facebook. Gradually members of Abby's family including her mum Angela join in and thank him for what he has done for her. Whenever he tries to phone Abby she is out or asleep but he gets to know Angela well.

Abby's older stepsister Megan seems particularly interested in Nev and they begin an online relationship. Nev is falling in love.

The bubble bursts when she forwards him a song she recently sang. Nev's brother, a filmmaker, recognises the song and finds the exact sound clip on YouTube. Now Nev decides to visit the family to see Abby and Megan for himself. What he and his filmmaking friends find transforms the film from a mystery to something more like horror.

At this point the film's distributor asks that we not give away the ending. Fair enough, it is a powerful finish to strange film.

In spite of questions about its authenticity the film is gripping and creepy. I found it relevant to today's computer users, especially to those on social networking sites. Just how do you know who you are talking to?



**Cell 211**  
Hopscotch  
R4 DVD

*Spanish with  
English subtitles*

Prison thrillers are a wide ranging genre. They can be superb, like *The Green Mile* and *The Shawshank Redemption*, or complete exploitation trash. It has been a while since we have had a really good one but *Cell 211* stands out. It has an intelligent plot and great acting. The personalities of the protagonists are brought out strongly, which is important to give the film its credibility.

Juan is a newly appointed warden who has turned up at work a day early to learn the ropes and show his enthusiasm. He needs the job – his wife is pregnant and while the job is dangerous it will give them a little extra income. There is an accident and he is hit on the head by a lump of concrete. The other guards put him on a bed in Cell 211 and go to get help. It is at that moment that the prisoners riot and one of the rioters finds Juan regaining consciousness in the cell. He is bleeding from a head wound and they assume he is a new prisoner who has been bashed by the warders. This is, apparently, a common practice. Juan improvises and goes along with the idea to save his life.

The prisoners are led by the charismatic Malamadre, a menacing thug who will never be allowed out of prison. He has limited long-term planning ability but he has organised riots be-



fore in other prisons. Juan is able to gain his confidence by suggesting better ways to achieve his aims. He also manages to save the life of a guard. He suggests to the prisoners that if they kill the guard the SWAT team will take over the prison and there will be wholesale slaughter. Instead he suggests cutting an ear off the warden – the SWAT team will come in if a guard is killed, but will not think an ear is worthwhile. To prove his credibility, Juan has to do the amputation. Malamadre comes to feel a growing respect for the young man. They even swap information about their lives and families.

There is a further complication. The prison houses a small number of ETA terrorists. These men worked for the Basque separatist movement and now the Basques have got a sort of home rule the terrorists are “sacred” – they will not be touched by the warders. They are somewhat more intelligent than the average prisoner and they suspect Juan may not be a real inmate. There is an uneasy truce between the inmates and the terrorists.

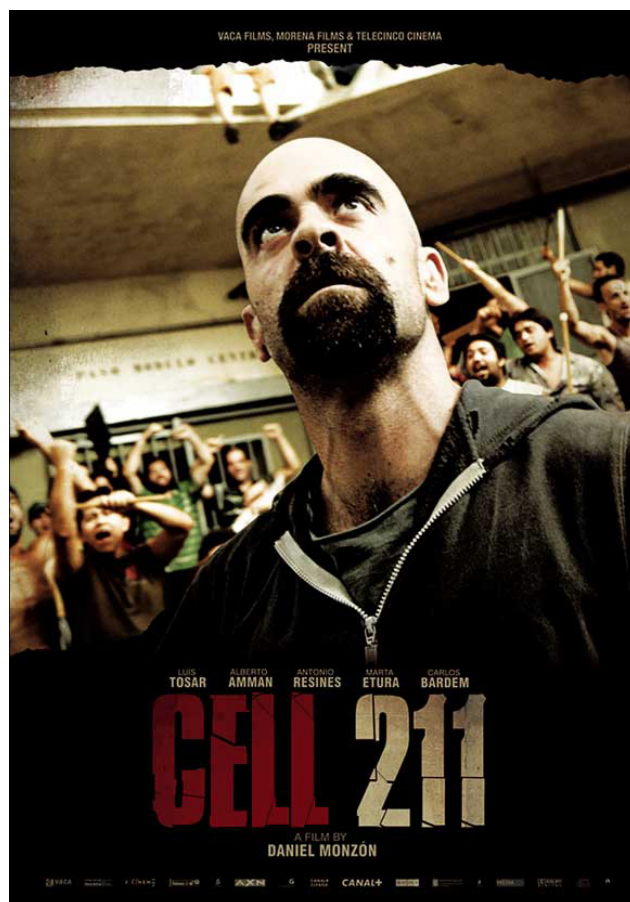






For the government the situation is getting worse. Word has got out about the riot and supporters and family are gathered at the gate in a rowdy group. In the crush when the riot police attempt to break up the crowd, a warder hits Juan's wife with a baton. She is taken to hospital, but dies soon after. Even Malamadre feels some sympathy towards the young man. When Juan learns of his wife's death he is enraged. The warder is sent in to negotiate and Juan slashes his throat. Sooner or later the SWAT team will move in, but not before Juan and Malamadre come into conflict over who is leading the rebellion.

It is interesting to watch Juan's attitude change as he sees and hears of the atrocities carried out against the prisoners. He is basically a nice guy but in the prison he must become as tough as the inmates and show no weakness. As events progress he becomes more and more like a prison tough – we suspect that he may not



be entirely acting a role any more. Then Malamadre finds out that Juan is actually a warder. Will the growing respect between the two men be enough to save Juan? Can both of them survive the terrorists' agenda? Even if Juan survives he is now a murderer.

The film was powerful enough to carry off eight Goya Awards, the Spanish equivalent of the Oscars. It is careful not to make heroes of the prisoners but shows them as they are, a savage bunch who have been downtrodden for too long. Cell 211 is truly a magnificent film and well worth watching.



**D13-U**  
**DVD and Blu-Ray**  
**Icon Films**  
**R4 DVD**

If you are a fan of the U.S. action films like the Die Hard series, try this one. The Screenwriter / Producer is Luc Besson, a French director who seems able turn out brilliant films in any genre. Direction was by Patrick Alessandrini, a relatively new director. This is his first action film and he managed to put an enthusiasm into it that is reminiscent of the Ozploitation films. D13-U is a non-stop action film in the U.S. style but the killings, bombings and violence would probably lead to savage cuts in America. The title, incidentally, is short for District 13 – Ultimatum.

D13 is District 13 in Paris. It has become a slum of immigrants, gangs and low-income workers. It is pretty much run by the gangs since the government has done nothing in the way of civic improvement. With no industries and few jobs the people have turned to the only source of income available – production and distribution of drugs. Now a development firm, Harriburton (not very subtle) wants the people removed so they can take part in a massive redevelopment of the area for middle-income workers. They are in league with Gassman, a corrupt politician.

Damien Tomasso is an honest cop working for the Dept of Internal State Security. He has just taken out a major Chinese drug lord in District



13 but while recovering at home he is raided by the police who “find” planted drugs. He manages to get a phone call to his friend Leito and together the two break him out of prison. Leito gives Damien the bad news that whenever a corrupt government is going to do something unethical it first takes out the honest people who may put up a fight.

Gassman has orchestrated an execution of a couple of street cops and put the blame on the gangs of District 13. If law and order, such as it is, breaks down in the slum he will be able to justify razing the District.

The only way to fight him is for Damien to unite the gangs and raid the government headquarters. He can then present evidence directly to the President, who is already reluctant to bomb his own citizens.

In keeping with the style of film there is not a lot of character development, just long action scenes that will keep you on the edge of your seat. There is enough martial arts to keep fans happy, there are lots of death-defying leaps and plenty of car crashes. I have developed a liking for Besson’s work and this film is as good as any of his that I have seen.





**Freight**  
British Crime Drama  
Icon Home  
Entertainment  
R4

This film once again asserts the position of Britain as a maker of fine crime films. They do not make the carefully sanitised films that are becoming prevalent in the U.S. British films are violent, antisocial and far more realistic.

The plot confronts the people-smuggling issues of such concern in Britain today. The human trade is largely in the hands of organised criminal gangs. In this case, it is a Romanian gang led by the completely amoral and vicious Cristi. He smuggles Romanian people into Britain in freight containers. He then demands that they pay their way by working for him. The men will be fodder for the illegal fights that he runs. The women will be put into prostitution. He has special clients for little girls.

Gabe Taylor (played by Billy Murray, most notable for his role as a bent detective in *The Bill*) is an ex-criminal who is now going straight. He is also ex-SAS and seems to have lost none of his hardness. His daughter is kidnapped by Cristi's men on the eve of her wedding and Cristi threatens all out war against Gabe. When one of Gabe's sons is murdered he takes up Cristi's



threat and the war begins. Many of Gabe's men look like hard cases as well, so he is well prepared to carry the fight to Cristi. He is stunned by the sheer ferocity of Cristi's methods – kidnapping, murder, bombs, and fights to the death. Cristi does not appear to be psychotic, just brutally violent. He is a man to be feared. But now that he has been provoked, so is Gabe. When confronting Gabe, Cristi makes a telling point – he acts like this because he can. The British do little against him so why shouldn't he treat the country as his own?

The film is very skilfully acted and directed. It is filled out with a good range of interviews and featurettes, and even a photo gallery.

The action doesn't slow down as the war escalates. There are no little moments of humour to lighten the film, as in *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*. It is uncompromising and bleak. Even the background music track is dark and brooding and suits the film perfectly. The film is great entertainment in the British no-holds-barred style. It's definitely worth watching.



**Ghosted  
Prison Drama  
Britain  
Revolver  
Entertainment  
R2 DVD**

The British excel at prison films and this one is no exception. It is violent, full of nasty people and even the prison warders are not the best. There may be some hope there but the environment and inmates of a prison will crush it.

Jack is serving out his time, keeping his head down, and looking forward to his release in a few months. On the anniversary of his son's death in a fire he learns that his wife has a new boyfriend and no longer wants anything to do with him. One of his friends, Ahmed, counsels him that if he can't change what has happened to him in the outside world perhaps he should look for something worthy to do while still inside. Jack takes the advice and befriends Paul, a young prisoner who has just been "ghosted" in from another prison and doesn't know the setup here. Paul has been taken under the wing of Clay, a vicious thug who runs all the minor prison rackets with the connivance of the chief warder. Clay keeps the prison inmates quiet and the warder lets him get away with his petty crimes and standover tactics.

Clay rapes Paul in the showers. At this point Jack sees a worthy cause in saving Paul. He steps in and has Paul moved to his cell. This, of course, does not please Clay. Jack has made an enemy. In a bit of gang violence possibly instigated by Ahmed one of Clay's enforcers is knifed.

He is "ghosted" out, just disappears to another prison, and Clay's power is now under threat. Clay's onetime friend, the warder, punishes Clay for disturbing the quiet prison by putting him in solitary for a while. Clay has to do something to retain his influence. He and his remaining enforcer knife Jack in the leg. Although Jack could kill Clay it is better to accept the punishment and keep the status quo – after all, he will be out of prison soon.



The knifing makes a hero out of Jack. Paul is becoming friendlier, and he gets more friends when it is found that he is a magnificent sketch artist who can draw sketches of the cons from memory. With this added respect Paul is once again a threat to Clay. One of his sycophants remembers Paul from a previous prison. Paul was "ghosted" out for his own safety. He suggests to Clay that Paul is hiding something. Clay twists this and uses it to reduce the trust between Jack and Paul. The two eventually confess to each other what they did to be imprisoned and Jack finds their lives have crossed before. He reacts with uncharacteristic violence.

Director Craig Viveiros has worked in different facets of the film industry for some years and his experience shows in this film, even though it is his first full length feature. It is tightly filmed, fast moving and human. It is violent but the violence is appropriate for the subject – he doesn't glorify the violence for the sake of blood and gore.

He has chosen a range of good, experienced actors. I particularly enjoyed seeing Art Malik once again as the quiet, wise Ahmed. I last saw him in True Lies as the slightly incompetent terrorist Aziz. Martin Compston as Paul plays the naïve young prisoner well, but it's the demented-looking Craig Parkinson as Clay who is the strong point around which the story revolves. By contrast, John Lynch as Jack plays a strong part as a man who is being propelled by events away from his release. His life is now under the influence of others and it threatens his previous good record as well as his life. We are left wondering where he will end up and if he is strong enough to bear it.

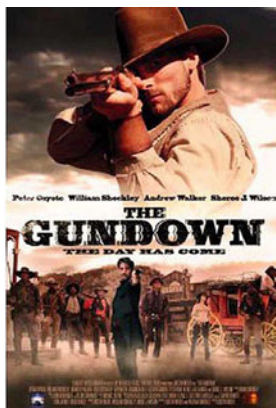


**The Gundown**  
**Anchor Bay**  
**Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

The Western genre is almost dead in the U.S. As Dustin Rikert, the co-writer and director of *The Gundown*, points out, there are no Western TV shows so there is no follow-on for the younger generations to move on to the Western films. He set out to make a film that had the action content of an Indiana Jones-type film. The plot is not overly complex but the film is filled with action to appeal to younger audiences as well as the lovers of traditional Westerns. All the elements are there, from the tired aging Sheriff to the prostitute who wants to better herself.

It is the 1890s. A gunman-for-hire and ex-Range Detective, Cole, is travelling around Arizona looking for the gang who killed his wife and family five years earlier. He comes into the town of Dead River as the Sheriff is trying to deal with a major problem. A gang of outlaws has a scam running, led by Travis, the owner of one of the town's saloons. The rowdies in his gang will terrorise the town until the Sheriff can't handle it, then Travis will offer his "services" to run the gang out of town. He has been running this protection racket for a while and the Sheriff is well aware of how it worked in other towns. He will not hire Travis but he is getting no help from the State Capitol so he is running out of options. As part of their troublemaking the gang shoots Thomas Morgan, the owner of the other saloon. His tough-as-nails wife takes over and it is obvious that she is going to be the next target.

Cole comes into town with the body of one of



the gang he ran into. The man is a wanted criminal so he gets a decent reward for it. The Sheriff, who sees Cole as a decent man, asks him to work as a Deputy. Cole declines and heads off to the hotel for a bath and a meal, meaning to keep moving on. At the hotel he meets Cassie May, a young prostitute, who also sees him as decent type. The murdered saloon owner Thomas has been teaching her to read and write until he was killed and now his wife decides to help the girl as well. Travis is worried about this new gunman in town and marks down Cole for death if he shows any sign of becoming a Deputy.

Whether he wants to or not Cole has become involved and now must choose sides in the fight.

The film was shot in a tourist western village called Gammons Gulch. It has a great look for this type of film but it didn't have a saloon so the film company helped them build one. They also advised on matters like ceiling heights and rafter spacing to accommodate film lighting, with future films in mind. A lot of action takes place in the saloon and the careful preparation of the building gives the shots a quite authentic look. That can be said of the whole film. Everything has a gritty feel that the Spaghetti Westerns got right. When Cole comes in off the trail he is dirty and unshaven and looks like someone who has been on the road for days. The buildings are rough and unpainted. There is none of the "he's wearing white so he must be a goody" nonsense.

If the Western is ever to have a revival, this is the sort of film that will do it. It is full of stereotype characters but has a good plot, some excellent actors and non-stop action. It is simply good entertainment from start to finish. Bring back the Western !



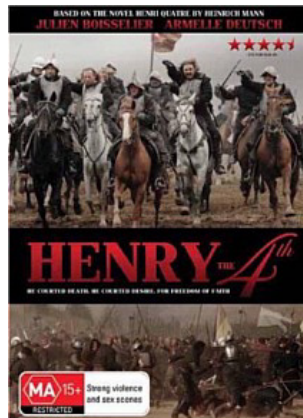
**Henry the 4th**  
**Historical drama**  
**France**  
**Eagle Films**  
**R4 DVD**

*French with English subtitles*

This story is about the French King Henry of Navarre, not the English Henry immortalised by Shakespeare. It is about power – the power of being King of France, the need to hold onto that power, the religious need to control the King, and the struggle to keep that power.

Today it seems quaint that people should regard a King as an almost godlike being simply by virtue of an ancestor having a bigger army than the other contenders. It seems even more ridiculous that the religion of the King should be a matter of any importance, but it was important enough to the Papacy that it would condone crimes like murder to keep its power over the King. In sixteenth century France all these influences come into play.

The weak and drunken King, driven by his scheming and strongly Catholic mother Catherine who has a lot in common with Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, will soon be murdered by his brothers or even his mother. He is aware of his impending doom and is terrified by it. His ambitious brothers are currently in the direct line of descent (another quaint idea) and the King's mother knows there will be internal war if one or other wins the ascendancy. It is essential in her mind that her family retain the crown and the



power behind it. The only way out of conflict will be to marry off the King's sister and insert a newcomer into the line. .

Such a one is Henry of Navarre, the young ruler of a small kingdom in the south of France. He would like the power to unite France and end decades of religious war but he has one problem – he is a Huguenot, a Protestant. Catherine feels she can convert him to Catholicism and make him acceptable to the Pope and the French people.

She offers Henry the hand of her daughter Margot. This and his conversion will make him a better option than one of her other sons. The bait is Henry's chance to unite France and stop the religious warfare.

Henry attends the Court in Paris and the marriage takes place. The marriage does nothing to appease the Catholics. He falls straight into the assassination of the King set up by the King's brothers and using Henry and his Huguenots as scapegoats. The Huguenots of Paris are slaughtered by mobs. Henry and his men only just escape. In retribution Henry raises his army and sets out to take Paris and the Kingship by





force. His army wins and he is now one of the most powerful men in Europe.

Some years later he has managed to consolidate his power and is making improvements to the lives of the peasants and increasing the country's wealth. He has almost broken the Treasury to do this. He does not have an heir. Margot is barren. There is another girl who attracts him, and he asks the Pope for a divorce but a Papal Legate tells him there will be conditions. The Pope does not want to lose his power over France's rulers. To get a divorce Henry must drop his new girlfriend and marry a woman from the Medici clan of Florence.

The Medicis have been strong supporters of the Pope and have achieved great power by intermarriage with Europe's leading rulers. Henry, and therefore France, is now a prize to be influenced or destroyed. His new girlfriend, pregnant with his child, is poisoned.

Such reasons for war now seem ridiculous to most, but in those days people were more easily led. They believed in the power and almost supernatural aspects of the kingship and the Pope. The King had the power of life and death over them so if he turned Catholic the peasants followed on. This in turn meant more income and power for the Catholic church. In many ways the film is a comment on the stupidity of people's beliefs, but at the time everyone be-



lieved what they were told. The film shows the fight for power behind the castle walls among those who should have known better

The film is a little different from the usual French period dramas. The days of conspicuous wealth had not yet arrived. The Louvre palace looks dingy and has none of the grandeur of later years. The costumes have little of the overdecorated look of the Louis period. Instead we have a grittier realism that carries on through the buildings and the people to the mud and blood of a battlefield. It covers an important part of the history of France. While Henry tried to improve the lot of the peasants later rulers lost touch again and their suppression of the people led to the Revolution.



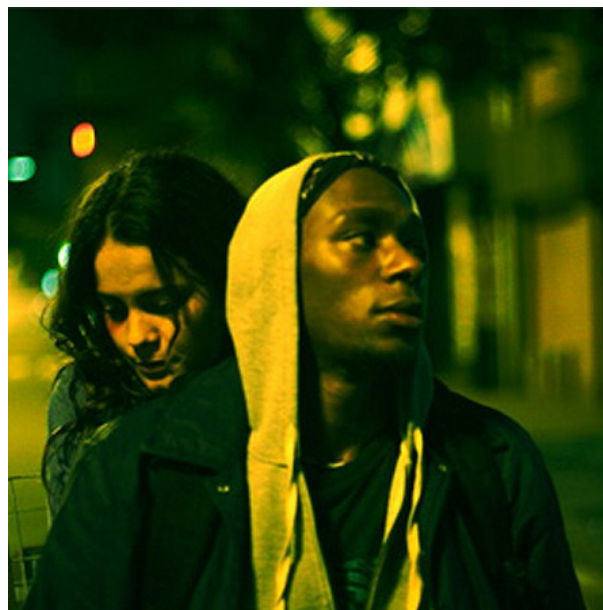
**Journey To The End  
Of The Night**  
Thriller  
Brazil  
English language  
Reel DVD  
R4 DVD



There seems to be a trend developing to take crime films out of their traditional U.S. homeland and locate them in some of the grittier parts of the world. This film is set in Sao Paulo in Brazil and has a look of destitution and criminality that suits the story. From the sleazy streets and grubby, worn buildings to the groups of prostitutes gathered on the streets it has a look that is a perfect set for the film.

Expatriate American Sinatra owns a nightclub and brothel in a backstreet. A client has died on the premises while in the middle of having it off with a transvestite. He has a suitcase of heroin. Sinatra sees this as an opportunity to make a large amount of money and get out of the business and out of Brazil. He dreams of going back to the States with his young (second) wife Angie and her son.

His older son Paul, a violent drug-addicted young thug, will inherit the nightclub. Paul however has other ideas. He wants to doublecross



his father and keep all the drug money himself. He also has designs on Angie.

There is a problem. The man who died was carrying the drugs to a Nigerian group who will only deal with people of their own race who speak their dialect, Yoruba. It looks like the deal will fall through but Sinatra finds that the club's washer-upper, Wemba, is Nigerian and speaks Yoruba. With the promise of a large payment on his return with the money inexperienced







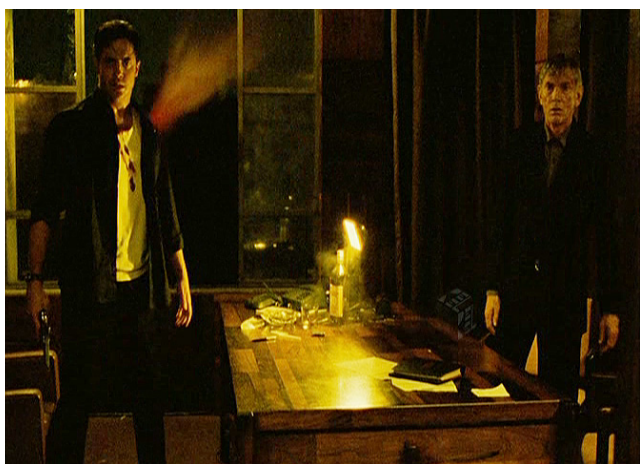
Wemba becomes the drug "mule".

He drives to the harbour of Santos and with some difficulty completes the deal with the Nigerians, but is mugged on his way back to the car. When he wakes up the muggers have been scared off, fortunately leaving the backpack of money. Wemba continues his trip home but with his mobile phone stolen he is unable to contact Sinatra and tell him of the delay.

Convinced that Wemba has betrayed them, Paul makes his move. He can at least get the club if his father dies. The misunderstanding will be fatal for many people.

This is a pretty hopeless film, in the sense that there seems no hope for any of the players.

They are just sinking further into the depths of



criminality and you are surprised when some come out alive. You may have some sympathy for Wemba caught in the middle, but in the end he, like the others, is just trying to make some easy money to improve his life by carrying drugs.

Even Sinatra's wife Angie was contemplating doublecrossing him and leaving him for Paul.

There are some rough and unlikely spots in the film but for writer / director Eric Eason's first full feature film it is a good, gripping production. I thought the American actors transplanted to the film might not work but Mos Def as the naïve Wemba is first rate. Brendan Fraser is just short of going over the top as the vicious Paul, but he carries the part well. Scott Glenn as the weary Sinatra who just wants a quiet retirement is perfect. He plays his part with just enough toughness to make his survival in Sao Paulo credible.

It is not a pleasant film but it holds the interest all the way through.



**The Lost Missile**  
**Vintage SF, B&W**  
**Cheezy Flicks**  
**Entertainment**  
**R1 DVD**

The film dates from 1958 when the world was still coming to grips with the scientific advances made in weaponry during World War II. The Cold War was well under way and the power of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles to pound a country to a radioactive wasteland was well understood by the public. The Space Race had begun and the Americans were losing. There were, naturally, many films made to exploit this fear. This film is not one of the better ones but it was typical of its times.

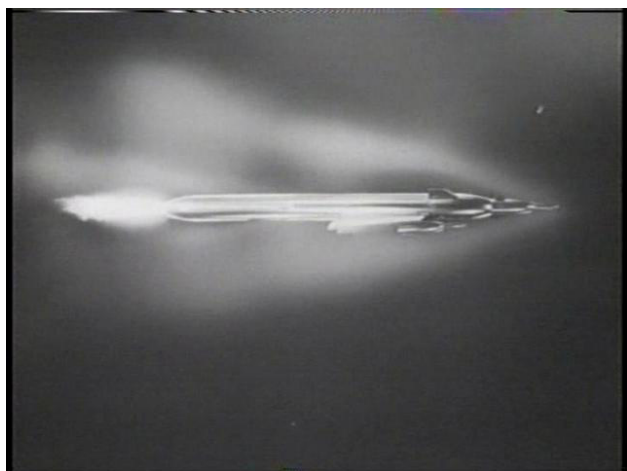
Early warning systems have picked up a missile cruising at high velocity down through Canada, destroying everything in its path. It can outrun fighters sent up to stop it and destroy any missiles aimed at it. On its present trajectory it will shortly be over New York. On successive orbits it will cover most of the world and mean the End Of Civilisation As We Know It.

The Americans have one last chance. They have a test missile on the launch pad waiting for an atomic warhead to be built and fitted. A scientist, David Loring, can fit it with a tiny atomic bomb triggering device. This may be just powerful enough to blow the lost missile from the sky. There are lots of other subplots and, of course, the compulsory love story of David torn between



his work and his fiancée. Fitting the warhead will undoubtedly involve him dying slowly from radioactivity or being burned up in the rocket's exhaust, which will interfere somewhat with his impending marriage. The things people will try to get out of making a commitment.

There are many filler clips from official films of the time and the prop rocket has a curiously Flash Gordon look with its extended tail fins. For most Americans this look was based on the German V2 rocket as well, the first practical long-distance missile. For its day it was probably a budget film and looks it. The effects are pretty basic but about as good as they got from that era. It is rather well made, however, within those limits. The suspense is built up nicely and towards the end I was expecting to see the scientist's heroic efforts fail and watch as "this thing from outer hell burns the world alive!". The plot, while fairly linear, is engaging and the feeling of despair builds as effort after effort to kill the missile fails. Cheezy Flicks has either got a good condition master or has done a good job at restoring an old film. It has its weak points but considering the film's age it is still a surprisingly good piece of entertainment.

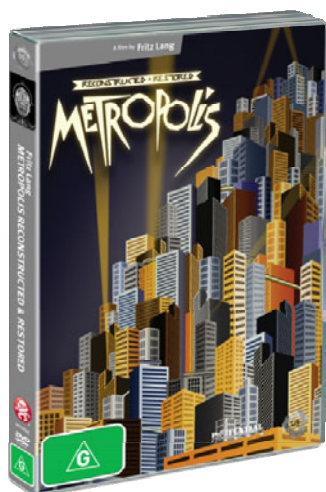






**Metropolis  
Reconstructed and  
Restored  
Madman  
R4 DVD**

Metropolis (1927) is considered one of the greatest works of science fiction ever made, it was also the epitome of German expressions. Directed by Fritz Lang it was the most expensive silent film ever made and steeped in controversy. It was severely cut after its premiere and releases in the west were difficult to watch both to low quality and to severe cuts, in many cases certain sections (especially those related to the robot) were put out of order. The 2001 reconstruction released at the Berlin film festival was believed to be the definitive edition however in 2008 a further 30 minutes was found in Buenos Aires, Argentina. After immense work including reconstruction and restoration this final version, some 150 minutes long, is now available on DVD. While some of the restored scenes are grainy, the best restoration has been had been done and these really do offer a complete vision of what Lang was attempting to communicate. There is so much more detail in this version, so many of the religious and political themes become clear and the context of the film becomes more obvious.



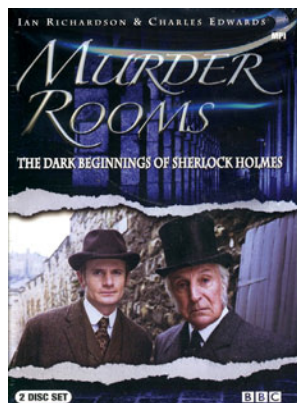
The new edition is startling in its quality and presence. It is beautifully restored and unlike the very first releases can be easily followed. It is quite a unique silent film in that it only occasionally uses inter titles and primarily emphasizes body language and facial expression. The imagery is powerful and evocative and it certainly is a memorable experience. The visual effects are really quite amazing for the period from the large machines, the great city to the truly incredible robot.

This is a film filled with nuance, it is not a simple plot. While it offers a vision of a dark industrial city controlled by the super rich, it also criticizes the violent tendencies of the lower classes. When the revolution occurs they destroy everything in sight and dance while their children nearly drown. This criticism of both capitalism and communism is a fascinating view of the future which in many ways still resonates today.

For a film made in 1927 it stands the test of time and is a significant work within the science fiction canon. It is a work no science fiction fan should be without.



**Murder Rooms –  
The Dark Begin-  
nings of Sherlock  
Holmes**  
Period drama  
Britain  
BBC / Icon  
R4 DVD



What is it about Sherlock Holmes that a fictional character should command such respect down through the years? At least in literary terms he was one of history's first true detectives, using observation and clues to build a picture of a crime. Until then detective work seemed to be a matter of a making a plausible guess as to the likely type of criminal then finding someone to fit the profile.

Holmes is accepted as having been based by Arthur Conan Doyle on Professor Bell, his tutor at the University of Edinburgh. Professor Bell assisted the police with forensic work. He believed that crimes could be solved in the same way as a medical diagnosis, by accurate observation and interpretation of the clues (the symptoms). This was regarded as a wild idea at the time but there was no doubting Bell's successes. The first episodes show Professor Bell demonstrating his techniques to a class of sceptical medical students. We see Doyle gradually coming to respect Bell's abilities, the conflict of Bell's ideas with police practice of the time, and the tragedies of Doyle's personal life. Professor Bell's prickly personality and more thorough examinations often showed up the deficiencies in police work. This did not win him any friends among the officers until they grudgingly came to accept his techniques.



Bell insisted that the details of his cases should be kept secret and eventually destroyed – the notes on each case were only for reference. Doyle based his Sherlock Holmes stories on the case notes.

Doyle's notes were sketchy and ambiguous. This was because some of the cases, and therefore the people, could be identified by the notes. Doyle himself was ashamed of his family's poverty and of his father, who was in an asylum. This is mentioned in the series but no conclusions are drawn apart from noting it as a problem for Doyle. Bell was able to deduce Doyle's family circumstances from Doyle's father's watch in a demonstration of his technique..

The show first aired in 2000. It was followed by four extended films using the same subtitle. Ian Richardson starred throughout as Dr Bell and carries off the part with tremendous authority. His depiction is far better than the traditional and rather wooden Basil Rathbone version of Sherlock Holmes from the black and white film days. Richardson adds life to "Holmes", and a passion that is missing in other depictions. His self-assured, irascible Bell contrasts well with the untested and still somewhat unbelieving Doyle.

There were further episodes written but never produced due to problems between the BBC's drama division and film division. There is still plenty of interest in Holmes.

Dare we now hope that the undoubted success that will accompany the DVD release might lead to the other episodes being put into production?

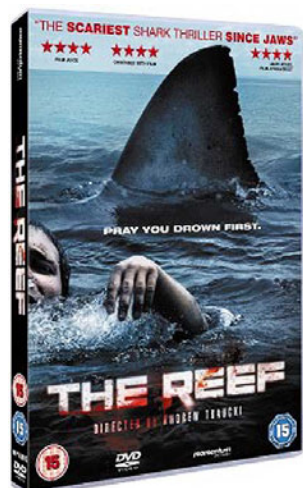


## The Reef Pinnacle Films R4 DVD

Some years ago the late Douglas Adams wrote a short piece on Australia. In it he discussed the range of animals in Australia that could bite, sting, or crush you to death. It appeared that everything but the sheep was dangerous. Curiously he missed out the sharks. They got a mention in an Australian film, *Open Water*, in 2003. I thought that film lacked something, though – the ending was never in doubt.

Now we have the latest contribution to Australian Tourism. *The Reef* is billed as “Pray that you drown first” – I would rather pray for help, really. Despite some comments, I don’t think the film is another *Jaws*. It doesn’t build up the same feeling of terror, and screaming women may be decorative but get a bit wearying after a while. Nevertheless it is a very good shark film.

A group of friends are sailing a boat from northern Queensland to its new owner in Indonesia. They hit an uncharted reef and the boat capsizes. They are off the normal air routes and shipping lanes so they must swim to an island for help. Enter the shark. One by one they are picked off in a series of sudden, bloody attacks. The shark keeps circling looking for the next meal. The women alternatively whimper and scream.



Will any of them make it to land and safety?

The shark is more menacing for being a reasonably normal size – it’s big but it’s not a giant, it doesn’t seem to nurse any hatred against people, it just does what sharks do in a cold and completely impersonal manner. In its own way it’s the shark that is the main protagonist in the film and it plays its part well even if some of the film is done with clips taken from elsewhere. The other actors are good but not impressive. The script simply wasn’t written for much character development, just for suspense. There is just enough to make the characters human but not get in the way of the story. In that, it succeeds well.

Writer / Director Andrew Traucki has been clever in the way he made the film fit his budget. We don’t get graphic details (well, not too many) of each attack. Many are just a swirl of bloody water and another one’s gone. He lets your imagination do the rest. There has been no effort to “internationalise” the film – the Great Barrier Reef is in Australia and the actors speak Australian. Special effects are kept to a minimum.

Douglas Adams only got half the story. He missed out the crocodiles, sharks, cannibals, Kylie Minogue and demented highway killers. Fortunately for Tourism Australia, I guess. I liked this film. Australian directors are getting the hang of horror films without resorting to cliché-ridden zombies. Now if only we could have a remake of Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Birds*, starring man-eating budgerigars.

**Turbulent Skies**  
**Anchor Bay**  
**Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

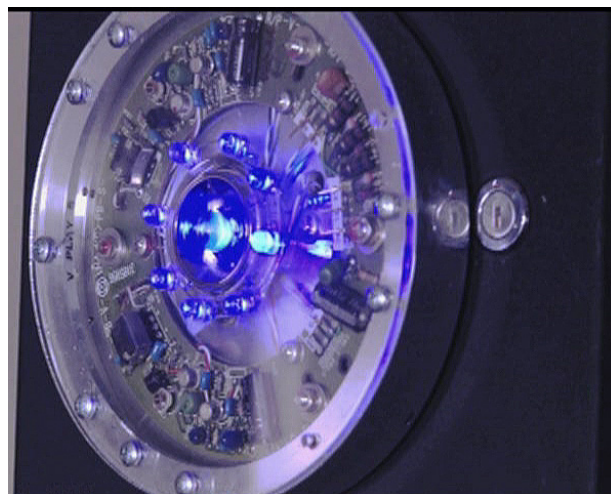
Everyone loves a good disaster film and this will keep your adrenalin flowing. Sure, it's a bit cheesy in places and the plot is a bit unimpressive, but it's all very well done.



We start with a stern warning that many air crashes are caused by pilot error, and to highlight this point we get a spectacular air emergency followed by a fiery crash. It's a good start and sets the scene well.

Cut to Devain Industries, who are launching their CD70 computerised aircraft controller to shareholders and the military. This should remove pilot error by removing the pilot, and we just know that it's going to fail. The programming was done by a husband and wife team played by Casper Van Dien and Nicole Eggert.

Unbeknownst to them the company owner's brash and arrogant son (played well by Patrick Muldoon, so well that you would love to knock his teeth in and take the slimy grin off his face) has had some programmer cronies modify the program to personalise it more in his image. They have managed to accidentally introduce a virus in the system.



The team is horrified when Mr Devain announces that the first test flight will carry passengers – the shareholders and military men who have just gone through the presentation. At least there will be two pilots on board, just in case.

The CD70 unit fails when the virus kicks in, the plane heads off course towards a massive electrical storm, and it will crash on Cleveland.

The pilots are locked out of the system (indeed, knocked out – the CD70 apparently has some sort of defence mechanism added). Tom (the male programmer) simulates the problem on the ground and works out a solution but there is nobody on the plane who can fix it.

He must go up in a stealth fighter conveniently fitted with a connecting tube that just happens to fit a hatch in the airliner, get to the cockpit and cut the wire that will disable the CD70. Then they have to get down again. If his mission doesn't succeed the Air Force will shoot down the airliner before it gets near Cleveland

The tension builds as problem piles on top of problem. It's all very skilfully done and you will be on the edge of your seat for a long while. This film will never class as a blockbuster, but as a budget release it's pretty good.





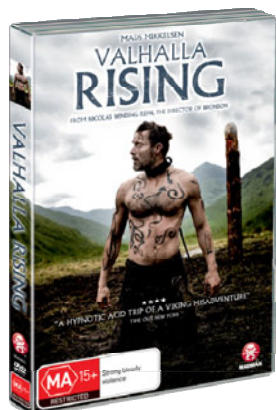
**Valhalla Rising**  
**Madman**  
**R4 DVD**

Valhalla Rising is a hypnotic experience, filled with beautiful cinematography, a haunting soundtrack and a plot which needs to be experienced rather than simply watched. It has many layers of storytelling including metaphysical and mythic speculation. On a surface level it is the tale of "One Eye" a former Viking abandoned in Scotland.

He is treated by the local clans as a slave and paid fighter and treated like an animal. He bides his time and when he escapes all hell breaks loose, but that is just the start of his journey. He meets up with a group of "Christian Vikings" who are supposedly on their way to the Holy Land. They are little more than uneducated thugs and the conflict between "One Eye's" pagan faith and the adopted religion of the Vikings is poignant.

This is indeed is a major theme of the film since the name One Eye can be related to the Norse god Odin and his premonitions and telepathic communication with a young boy seems to suggest a possible more than human quality for "One Eye". The Christian Vikings seem lost, violent and barbaric, it could be said that since they have abandoned the structure of their early heathen ways and adopted a foreign faith they have lost their bearings.

The narrative of the story is the journey of the Christian Vikings and One Eye as they seek the



holy land but actually land in America. As the desire for chattel and glory fails, the Christians loose themselves in madness and their true colours show. The film has many surreal elements with the conclusion being very powerful.

Mads Mikkelsen is quite astounding as One Eye and the young boy brings a level of compassion to this otherwise hardened warrior character. At times the film feels like a meditation on the beauty and brutality of nature with its cold mountains and unforgiving passes. It is all expressed in a three act structure and each leaves you considering the nature of its message. The film uses minimal dialogue and hence you need to be open to it on an emotional level. I found this a powerful and intriguing visual experience and it will be a film that will be kept in my regular watch collection.



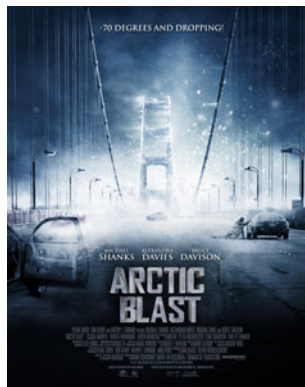
**Arctic Blast**  
**Thriller**  
**Anchor Bay**  
**Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

Veteran Australian director Brian Trenchard-Smith has produced a low-cost but well made *End Of The World* film. It looks more than a little like *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) but the science is more credible and the effects are not so overdone.

*Arctic Blast* postulates that a solar eclipse causes a rift in the already thinned ozone layer. Cold air from the mesosphere, the layer above the ozone layer, pours through. It may be very thin but it is also very cold – down to minus 180 degrees or so – and its effect on the denser lower atmosphere is catastrophic. It forms a huge sub-zero pool of air fronted by a superchilled fog that freezes anything it touches, and it spreads rapidly as more supercold air pours down. Other rifts are opening around the world and the end of civilisation is, once again, nigh.

The rift opened in the ocean off southeast Australia and a young meteorologist in Hobart is one of the first to come to grips with the impending problem. His boss in the U.S., however, wants to examine his data for a couple of days before issuing a warning. Similarly the Australian emergency people won't issue any sort of public alert in case they cause unnecessary mass panic.

The meteorologist is being distracted by his di-



voice case and with rescuing his daughter who has skipped school for the day and is off on the south coast surfing – right in the path of the rapidly-approaching cold front.

Finally with the help of his small research crew and his daughter he saves the day after his boss's plan to repair the rift fails. His family is reunited and they all live happily ever after now his wife is convinced of the value of his work. Aw shucks.

For a budget production the CGI, so important in a film like this, is superb. Somehow they manage to make a cloud look threatening. The graphics on the research groups' computers show clearly how such a problem could arise and what they propose to do to fix it. Although it is necessary to emphasise the climate change problem and some of the science is dodgy the film sensibly concentrates on the severe climatic event scenario rather than trying to cover the full spectrum of climate change. With the recent unprecedented flooding in Queensland these severe events now seem more real. Perhaps dramatisations like this will convince those that can't be bothered with the science.

If I have a gripe with the film it is about the silly title. The problem has nothing to do with the Arctic. Apart from that it is a good drama and well worth watching.





**The Baby**  
**Severin Films (2011)**  
**R0 NTSC DVD**

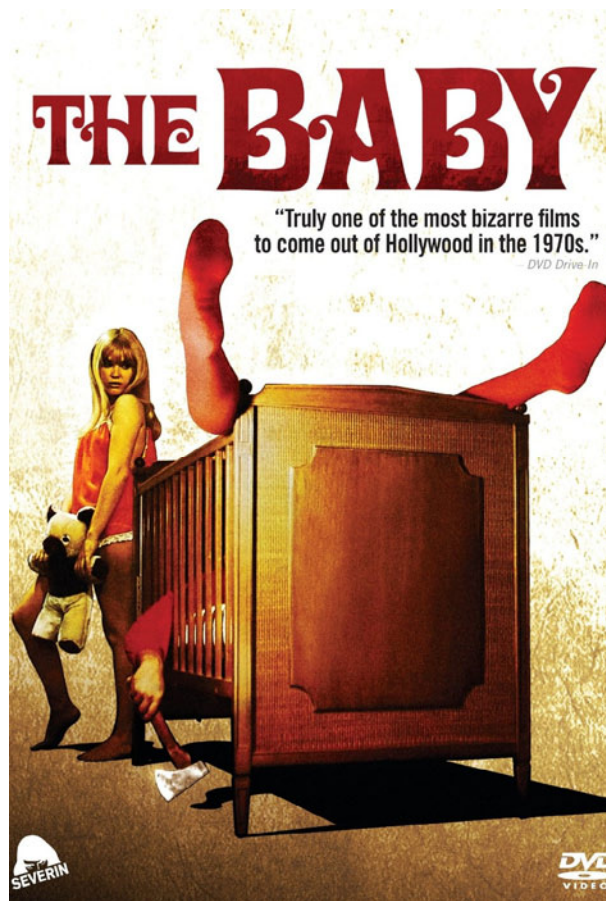
The Baby is considered one of the stranger films of the early Seventies and Severin has done an amazing job restoring this perverse masterpiece. It was directed Ted Post of *Magnum Force* and *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* and is probably a film he was probably forget even having directed.

The Baby is about Mrs. Wadsworth played by the dark and foreboding Ruth Norman who cannot deal with the fact that the fathers of each of her children has left her. She turns her last child into an eternal child. She turns her last child into an eternal child.

While he is somewhat backward she keeps him in nappies, in a crib and simply calls him Baby. He is allowed no outside attention and one of the daughters seems to show him undue sexual interest. He is taunted with a cattle prod and conditioned so he doesn't walk or talk.

Social workers have tried and failed and the last one that got close went missing. The new social one seems truly dedicated to helping Baby but something does not seem quite right. She seems obsessed with helping Baby and getting him out of the control of his mother and her strange daughters. The battle for Baby gets nastier and nastier as it seems the social worker has ulterior motives. Strange scene pile on strange scenes as a baby sitter is beaten for breast feeding Baby and the family drugs the social worker and try to stage a car accident.

The social worker survives with the help of Baby and steals him. Now her true intentions become



clear. When the family come to retrieve him she kills all of them with the help of her mother or lover (it is hard to tell which she is) and buries them under a pool she is having constructed in the backyard.

It is only in the final scenes the truth is revealed, her husband received brain damage in an accident and now has regressed to being a child and Baby is his new playmate !

A marvellously sick and depraved thriller with superbly bizarre characters !

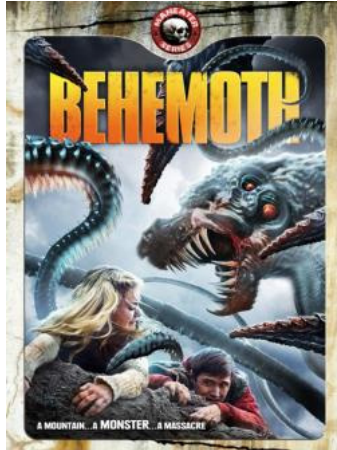


**Behemoth**  
**Maneater Series**  
**RHI Entertainment**  
**R1 DVD**

It seems that when the world is pushed too far, a creature rises from the deep to take revenge. In the words of Professor Walsh "The world pushed too far in any direction will push back!" Behemoth is a Sci Fi chanel original film from director W.D. Hogan. It is a B grade monster film with elements of the old creature feature and influences of Godzilla and Japanese monster films.

The once quiet town of Ascension is rocked to its heels when a dormant volcano begins to grumble. But Special Agents from the DOD soon discover evidence of an ancient enormous beast, the Behemoth, ready to rise from its earthen grave. It's up to our heroes to locate the DODs special weapon and destroy the monster before it's too late!

The film has obviously been made on a limited budget with acting and plot which are adequate but not great. The major problem is the lack of suspense, while the film builds a range of char-



acters and plot elements, there just isn't any real sense of terror. The creature does not appear until a long way into the film and surprisingly does little damage. From a great Behemoth the size of the mountain all he does he causes a few earthquakes, cause some havoc with the locals and is responsible for one or two killings. There is no body count and few human creature interactions.

Finally, in a true anticlimax, he gets shot with a handheld nuclear weapon of some sort and love and family triumphs in the end and the little town of Ascension goes back to its comfortable country lifestyle.

I have watched a lot of B grade films and it is amazing what you can do on a limited budget but here the money seems to have been wasted. The creature looks great yet it just doesn't work.

There was so much potential in this film yet it has never been realized. In my mind it is not a lack of money that has caused the problem but a lack of creativity.







**Nude Nuns with Big Guns**  
**Sleaze exploitation**  
**Pinnacle Films**  
**R4**

So apart from the most attention-grabbing title this year, what does this film have to offer? From the makers of that other great sleaze film *Run, Bitch Run*, *Nude Nuns* would be a credit to a better known director like Robert Rodriguez. We have the local church running a drug lab (staffed by nude nuns), prostitute nuns, biker gangs distributing the product, and a renegade ex-nun out for revenge. The result as you might expect is hilarious as well as bloody.

Father Bernardo and The Padre have built up a drug producing organization. They make a bit of



money on the side by renting out the nuns for prostitution. One nun, Sister Sarah, is a bit reluctant so they drug her up before her clients arrives. For some reason she resents this.

The biker gang Los Muertos distributes the drugs and does a bit of rape as a sideline. Their leader, Chavo, is also the enforcer for the religious leaders and runs the brothel where the nuns do their holy work.

God reveals to the drugged-up Sarah his purpose – she is to be his avenging angel. She escapes, arms herself, and starts to take her anger out on the priesthood. They in turn set the biker gang to find her and kill her in what the Padre claims is a “holy war”. Sarah recruits other nuns to help her and the slaughter is on.

Make no mistake, it is not a good film in the *Sound of Music* sense. In this film the drugged murderous nun is on God’s side while the Church is a satanic organization worth destroying. The actors are not great either. But there is, as the title promises, lots of nudity and guns. Combine that with the unlikely plot and you have, not a great film, but great entertainment.



**Orcs !  
Horror Comedy  
Reel DVD  
R4**

Somewhere in an old cave under Balancing Rock National Park a careless prospector has set off an explosive charge that has opened a gateway into the underworld of the Orcs. Only two valiant park rangers stand between the orcs and worldwide destruction. Well, not quite. One ranger, Cal, is a pot-smoking lecherous no-hoper with a truly bad moustache who wants to work in a National Park in Hawaii. The other, Hobie, is a naïve young trainee who is still full of the mythos of the National Park Ranger.

And they are helped by their radical environmentalist friend Katie who has a sackful of dynamite. With the dynamite and a stolen Orc bow and arrows (she killed the previous owner) she can create havoc amongst the orcs, while the men get into the slaughter with a cache of weapons owned by a now-deceased ranger. Will they be enough to save mankind?

Orcs have received bad press in films. They have been relegated to a minor role compared with vampires and zombies. It is therefore a pleasure to see them treated fairly as ordinary ugly homicidal creatures. The film owes a lot to the orcs in Lord of the Rings, in fact they are the spitting image of Peter Jackson's orcs. A lot of



the plot comes from Lord of the Rings and the characters can strike poses that are also reminiscent of those films.

There is plenty of blood and gore and detached body parts. There are battles, hand-to-hand fights, explosions, and dismembered golfers. What more could you want?

The film cuts back on the humour during the battle scenes, but during the rest of the story there are little spots of brilliance to keep the film going. The plot is still full of holes but who cares? Orcs! is a great piece of low-budget fun.



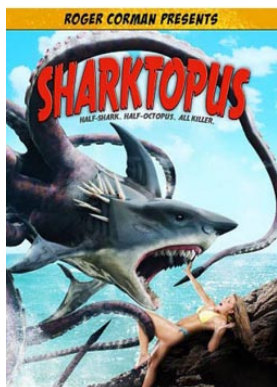


**Sharktopus**  
**Monster movie**  
**Anchor Bay**  
**Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

Roger and Julie Corman present us with another B-grade monster film featuring an improbable half-shark half-octopus, lots of screaming women and plenty of bikinis. Director Declan O'Brian has got the feel of Corman films perfectly and he has made a film that technically is as good as you could want. How he did this given the plot and the monster escapes me.

The monster can walk on land, breathe air and do everything but tapdance. The creature, dubbed S 11, is the product of the traditional evil geneticist scientist working for the military. We are not told what happened to S 1 through to S 10. It is bulletproof, can solve problems, and kills for fun. It kills by stabbing people with its tentacles or simply eating them. As usual it is out of control. The hero who will have to save the day is an ex-employee of the genetics company who has developed ethics and also has the hots for the boss's daughter. We see a lot of his bare chest. There are elements of many recent monster movies like Megapiranha and Dinoshark.

The film has some hilarious moments. We discover the dangers of bungee jumping over an ocean inhabited by a monster, and one of the best moments is when the Sharktopus decides to snack on a truly dreadful group of entertainers. You can tell when the Sharktopus is about to make an appearance – there is the usual



group of young louts of jet skis, the aforementioned bungee jumpers, the lone bikini-clad girl on the beach, the isolated fishing boat. You know they are about to die. The plot is that obvious. So why did I enjoy the film so much?

I have seen many monster movies in the last year. The genre is going through a revival at present and there is a lot of very ordinary conventional films being produced. Sharktopus is, if this is the right expression, a high-quality B movie. It has the traditional Corman feel that is more professional than most of the low budget productions. Corman's experience shows here – he has been making this type of film for decades so he knows how to make the most out of each dollar and Declan O'Brian is just as good at it. He squeezes in many action shots that keep the film moving, some great scenery (a lot of it in bikinis), and top class CGI. There is a certain bizarre pleasure in knowing what's coming next. It is not terror as such, just entertaining and very, very funny.



**Stripperland**  
**Schlock Horror**  
**Cheezyflicks**  
**Productions**  
**R1 DVD**

This film is an unashamed parody of *Zombieland* (2009), pinching the plot of *Zombieland* and bits of *Star Wars* and heavens know what else.

That's one of the points of parody, though – if you are parodying something then it helps if your audience knows what it is. *Zombieland* was a reasonable bit of schlock but *Stripperland* takes it to extremes.

"When there's no more room on the pole, strippers will walk the earth" we are warned portentously.

The strippers in the United States (and there seems to be an awful lot of them) have been infected with a zombie virus by an evil scientist. Our small group of heroes (tough guy, nerd, tough girl and uninfected stripper in disguise) decide to take a road trip across the United States to a west coast sanctuary. Why is safety always on the other side of the country? Along the way they must brave starving homicidal stripper zombies who are fast running out of food.

Fortunately the strippers are brainless bimbos. In the traditional style, they have trouble opening car doors or chasing people as they totter

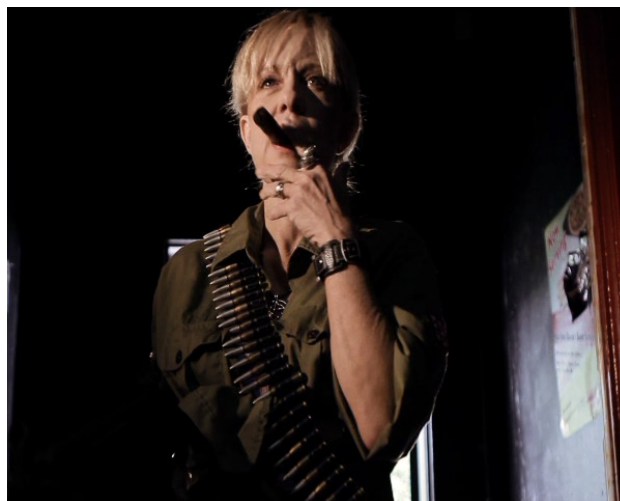


along in their high heeled shoes. In the presence of suitable rap or dance music they will immediately forget what they were doing and start dancing.

*"They won't eat me, because they have to stop and strip".*

The acting is OK if a little wooden. There are some nice cameo pieces from *Scream Queen* Linnea Quigley as Grambo, Jennifer Loomis and a bloodstained Lloyd Kaufman as the young nerd's father, hamming it up for all he's worth.

All in all, the film is pure schlock and therefore great entertainment. Best enjoyed with mates and beer.





**42nd Street Pete  
presents A Nite At  
The Venus  
Vintage Erotica  
After Hours Cinema  
R1**

Yes, it's another collection of erotica from Pete's seemingly inexhaustible collection. These three films were made in the early 70s when American porn had reached the bottom of the heap and films were being churned out in just days. Any storyline was simply to link the sex scenes together and there was no pretence at trying to make a good film. The three in this collection are typical of the period and they recreate a night that Pete spent at the Venus theatre. They star some of the big names of the period – John Holmes, Rene Bond, Sharon Mitchell and Vanessa del Rio.

**Flesh of the Lotus (1973)**

Director Bob Chinn made many films with porn star John Holmes and this is a good example. It tries to be a detective movie, but the attempt fails because simply none of them can act. It features John Holmes in his character as detective Johnny Wadd. There is much groping and shagging, as you would expect, as Wadd works his way through suspects and witnesses..

**Teenage Fantasies (1971)**

One of those lots-of-sex-scenes-with-a-link. Rene Bond provides the link, penis (not hers) in hand, then mouth, as she discusses ... well, teenage fantasies. Apparently teens in the seventies were a horny lot everywhere except the



school I went to. Then again, most of the segment stars are not exactly teenagers.

**The Horny Landlady (1975)**

Vanessa del Rio stars in this conventional story about a young boarder and a horny landlady. The boarder takes matters in hand, so to speak, and arranges a sex life for her landlady so she can get it on with her boyfriend in peace.

No plot, bad acting, Vanessa del Rio – what more can it take to sink this film? In fairness I must admit that del Rio does her part with enthusiasm, but that doesn't make up for the fact that she is unattractive and can't act. The film leaves no holes unfilled.

The quality of the films is pretty much what you would expect – scratched, faded and with dodgy sound. They haven't been restored and in a way the poor quality just adds to the authentic look of each film. They all LOOK as if they have been through the worn projectors many times. After Hours Cinema has included their usual one-sheet write-up on the films and their history, and these are always good reading.



**Carter Stevens' Pleasure Palace Grindhouse Triple Feature**  
**Vintage Erotica**  
**After Hours Cinema**  
**R1 DVD**

These films are from prolific director Carter Stevens for the years of 1978 and 1979. Stevens appeared in at least fifty adult films up to 1993, then moved into directing. He directed a further forty or so films up to 1996. He started off making "loops" (short film clips) but by the late 70s the audience was becoming a bit more discerning. Some viewers actually thought a porn film should have a plot, a concept foreign to most producers. Stevens expressed his attitude to the films as "Keep it sleazy. It's like the line in woody Allen's Take The Money And Run where the shrink asks him "do you think sex is dirty? And he answers "it is if it's done right".

He was able to adapt his plots to put a bit more serious storyline into them. So were many other producers. The competition increased. Although producers were able to get away with full penetration shots now, the audiences wanted more than the classic "stick it in, pull it out, wave it all about" approach. They were always in search of a gimmick to make their films stand out from the great grotty mass of cheap skin flicks. Stevens made good use of identical twins Brooke and Taylor Young. Although they were not the busty type by porn star standards, the concept of twins was one Stevens played for many years and a number of films. The first film, Teenage Twins, was a big success for Stevens.

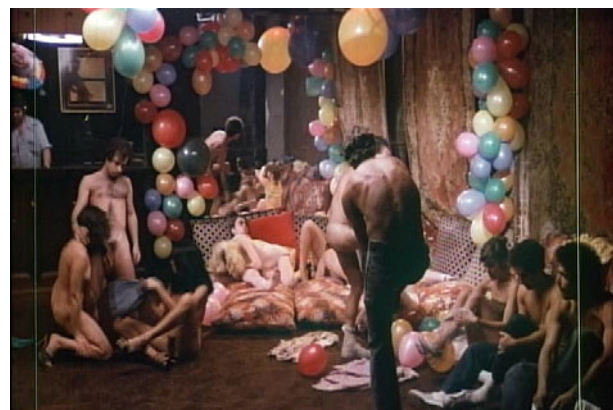
We see them here teamed with male twins in Double Your Pleasure, an otherwise unremarkable film. The two country girls have tried to disappear into the city. A large amount of money



has also disappeared from their father's safe. A city private investigator is hired to track down the girls and recover the money. So much for the plot, now on with the fornication.

The Love Couch is narrated by a talking sofa that tells of the sexual exploits it has witnessed. It whispers advice to its users about their sex life and of course they all turn into raving sex maniacs. Sure. The film was full of close-ups and to be honest after a while it became quite boring. It also featured that strange American fetish of wearing high heeled shoes while having sex, thereby risking serious injury.

Although the film was full of graphic sex, the







original videotape had pot-smoking scenes edited out. We don't want to corrupt people, do we? At least the women still looked naturally attractive, not the silicone-filled caricatures of today's porn.

Pleasure Palace is a story of Mike and Jimmy, an ex-Vice Squad cop and a sleazy lawyer, who decide to buy a brothel in the country. We get a guest appearance from Jamie Gillis who was by now well known enough to get separate billing in the credits.

We get lots of sampling of the merchandise by Jimmy, and the local Fire Chief gets his hose thoroughly tested when he tests the building for fire code violations. The word soon gets around the local businessmen. Anything can be overlooked for "services rendered". The next ones to get involved are the local mobsters. That's when things really get heavy.

The film has more plot than usual and it turned out to be a commercial and critical success. Surprisingly many of the actors and actresses had training and ability to act. It is probably as



close as Stevens ever got to his ultimate goal of making "real" films. The audience liked a porn film with a plot, as 1978 films like Debbie Does Dallas, Sexworld and Pretty Peaches showed. Unfortunately for Stevens other producers also realised this and the finance went to productions bigger than he could make.

There is a fascinating interview with Stevens on Disk 2. He recounts his experiences while making these films, and the difficulties of the industry at the time. He has a good sense of humour so unlike many Directors Interviews, his is fun.

Stevens was an important filmmaker in the erotica genre. He was in the industry all the way from the early loops and stayed in it into the era of well funded and well produced commercial-standard films. As such, After Hours Cinema is performing a useful service by cleaning up and re-releasing many of his films, some of which have never appeared on DVD.

I wish I could find out the brand of that damn sofa.



**Grindhouse  
Triple Feature:  
John Holmes  
Unzipped  
Collection  
Vintage Erotica  
After Hours  
Cinema  
R1 DVD**

These films are typical of the standardised porn being produced in huge quantities for the 70s Grindhouse market. They were shown back-to-back in the sleazy backstreet theatres nearly twenty four hours a day, with just enough of a break to wipe the sticky stuff off the seats.

By now such films had been reduced to a formula – lick, suck, he gets on, she gets on, he takes her from behind, money shot. For variety black actresses would feature, or there might be a bit of fondling, but they were only there for padding. Much the same formula approach is still used today, just with a lot more silicone. Budgets were negligible as shown in these films. A bed or a couch (or in big money productions, both) were all the set that was needed. A certain quota of money shots was required in each film. If you ran out of ideas but still had to fill in fifteen minutes, an orgy scene could be quickly put together. It's not as if you had to write a script for it.

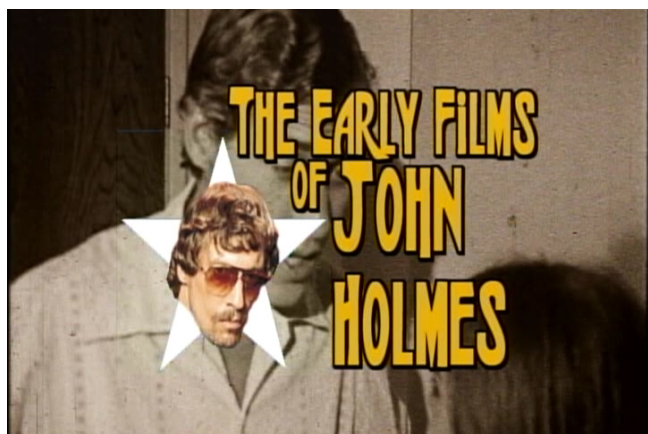
John Holmes' big advantage (if that's the right description) was that he could ejaculate pretty much on command. This made him popular with directors, who could get a film "in the can" in a



day with such a compliant leading man. His other bigger advantage was that he was quite well endowed, at a time when size equated to sexy (at least in the minds of the directors). It was rumoured to be over 13 inches long in his later days. He never seems to have taken it seriously, though. His biography is titled "A Life Measured in Inches".

This compilation includes three of his earlier films. I'm not going to bother outlining the plots as mostly there isn't one and they would be irrelevant anyway. None of the films were exactly classics and so have been unavailable for a long time. From somewhere, After Hours Cinema has managed to get prints that are in fairly good condition. Further enhancement, colour correction and cleaning up has made them quite useful. Even the sound in all its tacky 70s glory has come up well.

They will never occupy a significant place in the history of film but they are perfect examples of the sleazy quickies of the time.







# **Whore Angels** **Pink Eiga** **R0 DVD**

*Japanese with  
English subtitles*

The film is in the Japanese erotica style known as Pink or Eiga films with no genitals shown, but just about everything else is OK.

Production values are high, the girls are attractive in an unusual way and overall the film is quite good viewing – except for the unbelievable plot.

Komasa is a drifter who makes her living as a stage performer in erotic acts and as a part-time hooker. She likes to dress as a cowboy. One night she saves a purple-haired girl, Monroe, who is being attacked by the evil demon Rock and Roll. Monroe has a unique ability. She can heal people by kissing them. Komasa gets her a job at the whorehouse as well, and Monroe's abilities are soon noticed by the clientele. A



blowjob by Monroe can cure blindness and sexual dysfunctions. Business at the brothel thrives.

The girls enjoy a bit of lesbian sex while waiting for Christmas to come around. Monroe however seems to have something worrying her. She talks of how people have broken their contract with God and how the earth will be destroyed by the evil Rock and Roll at the end of the millennium.

As the last days of the millennium approach, Rock and Roll strikes again. If he can get to have sex with the angel Monroe then the earth can be destroyed. Komasa must fight him and drive him off. She is helped by a yellow-haired man who turns out to be a Japanese agent of the Vatican. In spite of his Italian background he calls women *Senorita* rather than *Signora*. He is a very confused Vatican agent, but when the world is saved he gets his own reward from Komasa. The purple-haired archangel Monroe renews God's contract with mankind for another thousand years, and once again civilisation is saved from the evil of Rock and Roll.

It's nice to know that we can sleep safe in our beds (or somebody else's) because we have a purple haired lesbian angel to protect us.



## Bloody Birthday Severin Films Region 0

The kiddies-as-killers horror films don't seem to be as popular as the zombie genre but they are still out there. Severin has re-released *Bloody Birthday*, one of the best of its kind. It dates back to 1981 and was something of a budget film. To look at it today we can see some of the rough bits but it is still a long way ahead its modern competition. Severin has produced the DVD from the original master print and the quality of the transfer is well up to their usual high standard. Sound and picture are as good as you could get for a thirty year old film.

The film is mostly played as a thriller. The horror element comes from little kids plotting murder then looking angelic at the funerals of their victims. How could little kids possibly be like this? In the film it is put down to an astrological conjunction on the day of their simultaneous birth. Saturn was occluded or some such and this has left the kids with something missing from their personalities. Like knowing the difference between right and wrong.

Although the kids are only ten years old they already have some impressive talents. Curtis is the technical type who can hotwire a car or zero out a house alarm system. He is a murderous little boy whose favourite weapon is a revolver. He is the one most likely to become a demented



gun-crazy psychopath if he lives long enough.

Steven prefers a knife. Steven is perhaps the most easily led, but he is just as evil as the other two.

But it's the sweet little girl Debbie who is the most dangerous. She is the instigator and organiser of many of the murders, but who could suspect a little girl of such crimes? She is wise beyond her years. She has drilled a hole through the wall into her sister Beverley's bedroom and lets the boys spy on Beverley as she undresses. For money. Curtis asks "But what if she catches us?" and Debbie replies "No way. Her brains are all in her bra".

The three set out on a rampage of gratuitous murder. A schoolteacher who is a bit strict for their liking. A couple having a grope in the cemetery. Debbie's dad, the town Sheriff (that's where Curtis gets his gun). Debbie's sister Beverley. The death toll mounts and some of the townspeople are finally becoming suspicious that the kids may have an involvement. Finally one of the kids' plans goes wrong and all hell breaks loose in an orgy of shooting and strangulation. How will they get out of this?

Undoubtedly the best actors are the kids themselves and it is their credibility that carries the film from simple slasher to true horror. We get an all-too-brief gratuitous striptease from that veteran of horror and slasher films Julie Brown as the well-displayed Beverley. Lori Lethin plays Joyce, one of the potential victims who has strong suspicions about the kids, as the heroine who first senses something is wrong.

There is an entertaining interview with her in the extras. Although the kids are played as simply people who don't know right from wrong, the actors manage sly little smiles when a killing goes off or they meet at a funeral. They may be amoral but you get the impression that deep down they may know exactly what they are doing and actually enjoy their power.

The film could so easily have fallen into the unbelievable schlock field but quality acting and good production have turned it into a cult classic that belies its budget origins.



**Bloodsucking Nazi  
Zombies  
Aka Oasis of the  
Zombies  
Aka Oasis of the  
Living Dead Etc  
Schlock Horror  
Cheezy Films  
R1 DVD**



Now this film is REAL schlock. It has all the necessary qualifications like an unbelievable plot, bad acting, dreadful music and low production quality. Even allowing for its production in 1981 as Oasis of the Living Dead the film is simply dreadful. You can start with the title – VAMPIRES are the bloodsuckers, not zombies. There are a couple of semi-nude scenes that neither titillate nor add to the plot. There seems to be a lot of tourist / travelogue clips spliced into the film – camels, so you know it's set in the desert somewhere and palm trees so you know they are at an oasis. Writer / Director Jesus Franco (better known later as Jess Franco) must have been having a bad day when he shot this turkey. Yet it has a sort of deadly fascination about it that keeps you watching, hoping against hope that it may get better. It doesn't. It's a bit like banging your head on a brick wall – it hurts, but it feels so good when you stop.

During World War II, a small German army squad was detailed to carry a load of German gold through the African desert. We don't know why, unless it was so the convoy could be ambushed more conveniently by the Allies. There



was only one survivor, an American. Over the years a number of people have become interested in the gold, especially Kurt, a German treasure hunter. Kurt kills the old soldier and it's left to his son now to find the gold. What none of them know is that the dead soldiers have been transformed into zombies. This leads to an orgy of hands reaching up from the sand and clutching unwary people, zombies chewing people up in the approved manner, and general mayhem. There is not much gore and splatter, though – they are not messy zombies.

This is about as low as zombie films can go, but Cheezy Flicks hasn't cleaned up the sound or the picture either. This gives the film a crackly sound track and oversaturated colours that look so perfect for this style of schlock. It just shows that even the French can make a truly bad film if they put their minds to it.



# Cold Fish Third Window Films R2 DVD

*Japanese with  
English subtitles*

Murder, passion and intrigue in the world of exotic fish ! From director Sion Sono we have the latest in his line of dark and curious horror comedies. The story is based on a Japanese serial killer crime spree known as the "Saitama Serial Murders of Dog Lovers", a real-life case about a dog trader who was involved in dodgy deals selling overpriced rare dogs. Any buyer who complained that they had been ripped off just disappeared.

In Cold Fish Shamoto is a dealer in exotic fish. It is a quiet lifestyle suited to his life as a bit of a nerd, but for the fact that his second wife Taeko thinks she has thrown away her life on such a boring man. His daughter Mitsuko hates her new stepmother and the feeling is mutual. One night Shamoto is called to a local store where his daughter has been picked up for shoplifting. They are saved from the embarrassment of her arrest by Murata, a fellow dealer in exotic fish, who bulldozes his way through the store's security staff by his forceful personality. He seems friendly enough, even if he is pushy and arrogant. He offers to give Mitsuko a job in his store to keep her out of trouble, but he may have something a bit more personal in mind for her.



His shop is staffed by half a dozen young girls who wear skimpy clothes and receive little more than food and board.

Murata forces his way into Shamoto's and Taeko's lives, and soon manages to have sex with Taeko. Then with Shamoto browbeaten into submission his darker side comes out. He is arranging a deal with a fish fancier for an overpriced rare fish. The buyer brings his money to Murata's shop and is reassured to find Shamoto is one of Murata's "partners". He knows Shamoto's shop and trusts him. He queries the price, though, and the deal looks like falling through. Murata poisons him.

The body is disposed of by being cut into small pieces and fed to the fish in a mountain stream and the bones are burnt. Murata and his equally homicidal and promiscuous wife are obviously insane. Shamoto is now an accessory to murder but seems unable to break free from Murata, who threatens his wife and daughter. Murata also reveals he has done the same with







fifty eight other victims and their money is what supports his luxury lifestyle and flashy shop. The police are now taking an interest in him. The dead man's brother, a member of the local Yakuza, is also threatening revenge. Shamoto is involved whether he likes it or not and seems unable to find a way out.

There is really only one way open to him and he takes it. He must start with a change to his placid personality, and then get his revenge in a way the police will accept. The outcome is bloody and violent.

The characterisation is interesting. It is hard to

feel much sympathy at first for Shamoto, who spends most of the first part of the film with his head down as he puts up with Murata tearing down what little self-worth he has left. Even at the end when he turns on Murata he seems like a different man and any compassion we may have for him is negated. By contrast, Murata later reveals the reason for his domineering personality and we can feel a very small amount of sympathy for him.

The second DVD in the set has an interview with Sion Sono which offers surprisingly little insight into his taste for strange films. Another segment deals with his creation of the film's poster, an interview that seems at first rather pointless. The combination of the two, however, starts to show how this surprising man thinks. We also have an interesting short section of the original Dog Lovers case.

Cold Fish is a rather intense film about dysfunctional people. How they relate to each other is what makes the film such good viewing. You try to guess what is coming next, but nothing seems to work out in an obvious way.



**Death Angel  
December:  
Vengeance Kill  
Revenge  
Chemical Burn  
Entertainment  
R1 DVD**

As a young girl December witnessed the rape and murder of her mother at the hands of a brutal gang, and the murder of her brother after his eyes were gouged out. Although scarred mentally



December manages to carry on with her life. After her boyfriend rapes her she turns violent herself. She masters the arts of self defence, shooting and swordplay then goes on the hunt at night dressed as a prostitute, looking for wrongdoers and doling out her terminal version of justice.

Inevitably she comes across the gang who murdered her mother. They are now richer and more powerful than before. They have a cute habit of going to a town then murdering the residents of an isolated house. For sport one of the survivors may be kept alive long enough to provide a quarry for the men to hunt down in the woods. Has December's training been enough to prepare her for this? Just as inevitably she is found out and there is a final bloody showdown. We've seen all this before in films like Kill Bill and Charles Bronson's Death Wish aka The Vigilante.

The theme of women empowering themselves to take revenge is not a new one, so what is it about this film that lifts it above the mundane? Good acting, mostly. While it is really just a good old fashioned blood and gore fest there are some brilliant characterisations. Leena Kusishungal does a good job as December, but the



show-stealer is the older and thoroughly evil-looking Fisk, the one who likes hunting girls in the woods.

Unfortunately the technical quality isn't up to the acting. The sound particularly was often swamped by a good if overloud background track, making it hard to follow the plot. The cinematography often degenerates to mobile phone quality – this may be an “artistic effect” but it's unnecessary and rather annoying. So are the constant changes from colour to monochrome.

You must expect some minor deficiencies in an Indie film. With the sort of budget that these films are made on they do well to get as far as they do. Sound, however, is one area where there can be no compromise – it works or it doesn't.

Otherwise the film is good entertainment. It's gory and the final showdown scene is extended and brutal. If you feel like a reasonable blood-and-guts thriller, try this one.





**Die**  
**Horror / Thriller**  
**Pinnacle Films**  
**R4 DVD**

Six people wake up in a strange room that looks like a basement. A strange man takes them out two at a time and they are offered a choice. It is revealed that each of the six has tried to commit suicide.

*"...so she did the unthinkable. She went against her faith and she jumped off a bridge. God would not let her die. Not yet."*

One of each pair is strapped to a chair. The other must then throw a die (singular of "dice") to decide the fate of the captive. Their death will echo the method by which the die thrower tried to kill themselves. Throwing a "1" will release the captive. The stranger explains that since they have decided to end their lives and usurp God's right, they must experience their suicidal death at the hands of another.

The one who sends them to their death will now use their original method of suicide as a model for killing the other. If they die then it is God's will and they can start a new life. The stranger calls this "the Trials". "It's all part of God's plan."

*"The only way to be reborn is to be given a new*



*life. You have to face the death you have chosen .....who is truly lost? Who deserves a second life?"*

Each of the abductees is forced to confront their lives and assess what they have become. In the real world a detective is trying to find the missing people. It is a race between more deaths and the arrest of the religious nut.

The pace is fast moving and each of the possible deaths builds up a tremendous tension. In this respect the film contains elements of Saw but in a restrained and less gory way. Rather than the theme of punishment prevalent in Saw it deals instead with the individual being persuaded to leave their lives in God's hands. Why God would employ a raving homicidal loonie as his disciple is not explained.



**Family Secret**  
**X Posse**  
**Productions**  
**R1 DVD**

In this unusual twist on a horror plot, we see a developing catastrophe within a dysfunctional family. Nana Phyllis McGee has finally died and the family has come back together for the funeral. There is little love lost between them, and Nana's legacy seems to be a family that is always at each other's throats. There is the spendthrift wife and her violent husband, the even more violent and overweight husband who hasn't worked in twenty years, the son who has ambitions of being a newspaper reporter but hasn't the talent. Geno, a grandson, appears to be the best adjusted of the whole sorry lot. He is a rising newspaper reporter, happily married, but even he has his bad memories of Nana. She seemed to delight in tormenting him as a boy. He describes to his wife how she once broke his pet dog's neck in front of him. She seems to have been an altogether nasty piece of work. Some years before her death she was suspected of the gruesome murder of some kids in her neighbourhood but in spite of a witness describing her fairly well nothing could be pinned on her.

Now she is dead but the killing has started again. A figure that looks like Nana Phyllis is



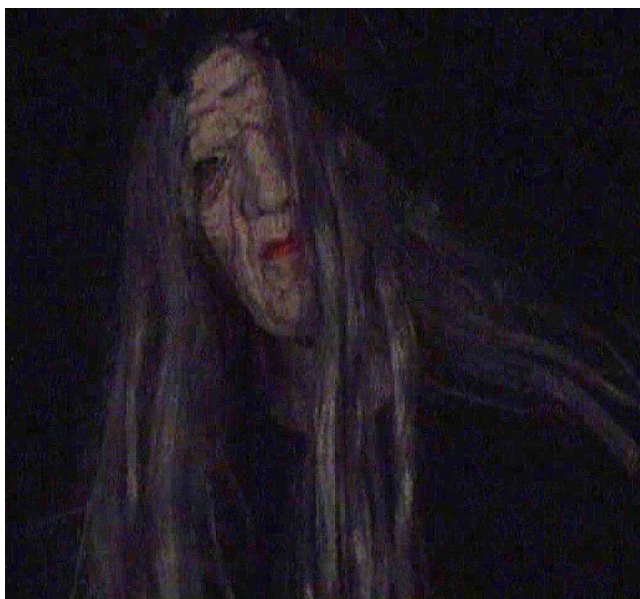
killing and dismembering people in the town. Most are members of the family or their friends or acquaintances. Since many have only recently spoken to Geno, he is becoming a suspect for the slayings. Even his dad who had long ago left and moved out of town becomes a victim.

Geno is at his wits end and is starting to wonder if Phyllis has risen from the grave or something. He digs up her coffin and it is empty.

There is a dark family secret that has been passed down for generations and Geno is about to run headlong into it.

Director Geno McGahee has given us a film that looks more like a detective story at first, with the brutal butchery providing a note of horror. The air of mystery builds until the end of the film although I must admit there were a few slayings that were well deserved and did a little to lighten the mood for me. By hiring professional actors for many roles McGahee has produced a very professional-looking film. There are a few areas where the acting was a little unconvincing but they are early in the film and it soon turns into a good mystery, then into a good horror story.

It is unusual to see an independent director handling such a large cast but McGahee manages it. Although the film is shot mostly indoors in offices and a bowling alley the range of settings takes the budget look away from it. In all it is quite a worthy production and I enjoyed it.

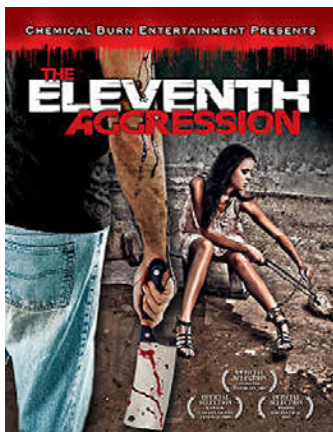




**The Eleventh Aggression**  
Chemical Burn Entertainment  
R1 DVD

This film is a cross-genre one, where the main storyline is a detective story but there is enough blood and gore to justify the "horror" tag as well. We have already reviewed *Family Secret*, another film that combines the two genres. The weakness of this approach is that the horror can be used to overcome the sheer lack of plot. In *The Eleventh Aggression* this could so readily have happened, but the plodding police work is offset by a mismatched pair of detectives whose own lives are affected by the killer's innovative methods of murder. The older detective does everything by the book which infuriates his younger sidekick. The younger one is brash and gungho but is gradually learning patience under the tuition of the older detective.

There is little mystery about the killer – we meet Jeffrey Walters at the start of the film filling his ex-girlfriend's vagina with drain cleaner. She cheated on him (no wonder, he is quite creepy) and he seems to like to make the revenge fit the crime. Most of the violence is left to the imagination with just enough splatter to give our imaginations a good workout. The killer apparently has no motive for the innovative but gruesome killings but a picture of him gradually forms as the clues pile up. Is he a thrill killer? The victims are unconnected, so what is it about them that has stirred up his aggression? Why is each victim killed in a different manner? When the victims are random, how do you know who will be



next?

Then one of the detectives gets much more involved in the case. His girlfriend has upset Jeffrey and she is marked for punishment. Suddenly he is in danger of being the next victim.

If we know who the killer is, and the graphic violence is played down, why watch the film? It appears to have a low budget but director Charles Peterson has made the most of it and given us a good story for the characters to develop in. Peterson has a wide experience in most aspects of the industry and his experience shows in the smooth way that the story unfolds. Apart from an annoying and unnecessary sequence filmed on a jerky handheld camera (very trendy – you must have at least one scene like this in every film) the cinematography is sharp and well-angled, especially in the killing scenes. Lighting is perfect for the moods. Little things, perhaps, but it gives the film a very professional look that makes it much easier to watch.



**The Frankenstein Syndrome**  
**Horror**  
**MTI Home Video**  
**R1 DVD**

Supposedly based on Mary Shelley's classic story of the mad doctor trying to reanimate human flesh, this film updates the concept to a group of scientists doing illegal stem cell research to find a universal healing compound. The project's ruthless manager.



Marcus, is using people from off the streets as his test subjects. The team is joined by a brilliant stem cell researcher, Elizabeth Barnes, who is quick to see where the problem with the serum might be. With a new batch of serum she is ready to proceed. The test subject responds but then dies in great pain. One of the security guards was in love with her and she was carrying his unborn child.

He tries to gouge money out of Marcus but the completely amoral Marcus simply shoots him in the head and he becomes the latest test subject. They feel if the serum can repair him, he will be childlike because most of his brain was blown away.

The serum repairs his brain and brings back his memories and he becomes a bloodthirsty monster who hates the project and its people. The serum has not only repaired his brain, it has en-



hanced bits that would be best left alone. He shows his disapproval by ripping their faces off.

As the project runs out of control with homicidal maniacs on the loose, Marcus is ordered to shut down the building and dispose of all the evidence. This will include the scientists, who are now caught between Marcus and the monster they have created.

The story raises once again the question of man acting as God, creating or destroying life. If the dead are reanimated, what will they be like? Will they be calm and rational or will they be monsters bent of revenge for the pain of their death and rejuvenation?

The film is tense and fast moving. The blood and gore is a bit excessive but at least it is not used to make up for a weak plot. It's quite a good film of its kind and better than average.



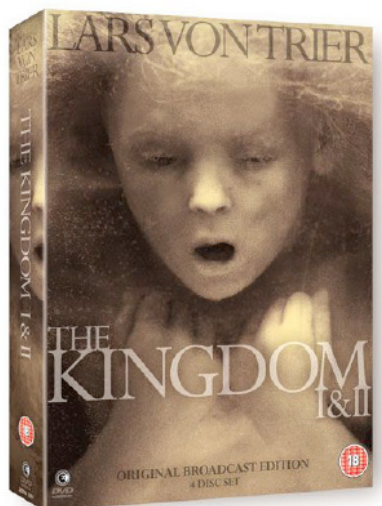
**The Kingdom  
TV Miniseries  
8 episodes  
Second Sight  
R2**

*Danish with  
English subtitles*

In this dark film Lars von Trier examines the battle between science and superstition. The Kingdom is the Rigshospitalet in Copenhagen in Denmark. The name is abbreviated to Riget which can also mean “the realm” or “the Kingdom”. It is old and decaying and gradually seems to be slipping into the prehistoric swamp on which it was built. The doctors represent the voice of reason and science, but the Kingdom has more than a fair touch of the occult. The hospital has gathered a number of mysteries.

There is the old-style ambulance that comes in every night but never has a driver or patient. Nobody can see inside – it is filled with a very bright light.

The hospital is haunted by the ghost of a little girl, Mary, who died mysteriously in the hospital in 1919. Her body disappeared but her ghost is seen from time to time, usually by those who are psychically sensitive or semiconscious. Her body was never buried, but was marked “for internal use”. “Why must I be killed?” - Mary’s tragic story unfolds during the series.



Mrs Drusse, a regular headstrong “patient” who has some psychic ability, is a permanent malingerer. She gets herself admitted to hospital by falsifying her symptoms, something she is good at. She is also good at comforting the dying, so the ward staff tolerate her. She has seen Mary’s ghost and is trying to find out Mary’s history. Her son is a porter in the hospital and she bullies him ruthlessly to get her way with access to parts of the building. As she investigates the hospital for spirits she senses something is wrong with the building. She will be critically important in coming events.

“The Lodge” is a group of doctors who will protect and help their own to the point of breaching medical ethics. Their aim is to fight all non-scientific substitutes for science and medicine like herbalism, chiropractic and all forms of “alternative medicine”. Only medical science should remain. In spite of this belief they indulge in silly childish rituals which look to be occult in themselves. The Lodge refuses to acknowledge some of the strange events that are occurring.



Two young people with Downs Syndrome work in the washing-up room of the kitchen. They seem to know exactly what's going on in people's minds. They know of little Mary and her ghost and they know of Mrs Drusse's attempts to contact her. They know of every involvement of every member of staff and the boy seems to sense that something nasty is about to happen. He may seem retarded but he is profoundly sensitive to the hospital's goings-on. His conversations with the girl, while not too relevant to the plot, summarise what has been happening and prepare us for what is coming.

The other staff have their own shortcomings.

The Administrator, Moesgaard, is an incompetent man who begins to lose his grip on reality when the hospital is investigated. He is a typical manager rather than a doctor. Instead of concentrating on improving the efficiency of the hospital he spends his time and effort on window dressing to impress the Minister, such as his "Operation Morning Breeze", a plan to improve the environment of the hospital for patients. So far the only practical signs of this Operation are the printing of a lot of stickers and moving some of the kids' paintings from the children's ward into the hospital corridors. He still affects a white coat, though. He spends most of his time covering up his own incompetence and protecting his friend Helmer but his efforts are no longer enough to cover up the inefficiencies of the hospital. There are moments of light comedy when the new Administrator finds out some of the things that have been going on.

Helmer, head doctor of Neurosurgery, is a rude, vicious and incompetent man. He is Swedish and hates Denmark and the Danes. He had to leave Sweden when he was accused of stealing the work of a colleague and publishing it as his own. The Kingdom is his last chance. He is now up to his old tricks again but uses his rank and the Lodge to defend himself. He is under suspicion for incompetence in an operation that left a girl brain-damaged. The Lodge will help defend him, but he has already managed to get rid of the incriminating reports from Archives. This has led Denmark's Chief Medical Officer to open a hearing into his behaviour and Moesgaard's administration. Helmer is the de facto administrator of the hospital's neurological staff in the absence of a competent administrator.

Dr Hook is a Registrar (junior doctor) and a victim of Helmer's regular jibes and rudeness. Hook is living unofficially in a small storage room in the network of tunnels and corridors that forms the Kingdom's lowest levels. From there he "fixes" things for the staff when not on medical duty. He has a wide group of friends and useful obligations built up from the people he helps. The hospital seems to be built on waste and inefficient use of resources so through his network of contacts he can get the right equipment to the right people. He has managed to get the last copy of the anaesthetist's report on Helmer's botched operation and is therefore a target for Helmer's increasing fury. Hook is also keeping a list of the hospital's other faulty operations. Horrifyingly, there seem to be quite a lot.

There are other eyes watching the Kingdom, too. They are not friendly. As the story changes from human drama and hospital politics towards grim horror the evil in the Kingdom increases, leading to murder, demon invasion and devil worship. In a hospital dedicated to science and medicine, superstition may be taking over. Mrs Drusse is finding this out. There are many intertwined plots, both human and occult. All seem doomed to disaster.

The DVD set encompasses the two series produced so far, but many questions have been left unanswered. Von Trier wrote a third series but since two of the main actors have now died it seems unlikely that it will be made, unfortunately. Steven King produced *Kingdom Hospital* based on the series, suitably Americanised of course. The story doesn't quite make it into the realms of conventional horror, rather it maintains a constant and mysterious creepy feel that is a good alternative to the splatter we could usually expect. It is the build-up of this feeling that gives the series its impact.

It is not a superficial series. You must follow the plots carefully or be left behind as they develop. It is well worth the effort.

The film is tense and fast moving. The blood and gore is a bit excessive but at least it is not used to make up for a weak plot. It's quite a good film of its kind and better than average.



**Skin Eating Jungle Vampires**  
**Chemical Burn**  
**Entertainment**  
**R1 DVD**

I am still of two minds about this film. Was it simply an incredibly badly-made amateur film, or was it made with tongue firmly in cheek? It looks like a no-budget effort with a lot of stock footage cut in, cheap props and sets, and loads of lesbian groping rather than a plot in the conventional style. Even the title seems to have been a quick knockoff coined after a few beers. There is no skin eating, little jungle and the women may be lesbians but are not vampires. Lets have a look at what you get.

The plot is unoriginal and not really important anyway. A spaceship crashed on Earth thousands of years ago and has been entombed in the lava of a volcano ever since. Its female crew from the planet Clitoria have survived by eating the occasional tourist. Now the volcano is erupting again and they may have a chance to get away if they can placate their god with a human sex sacrifice.

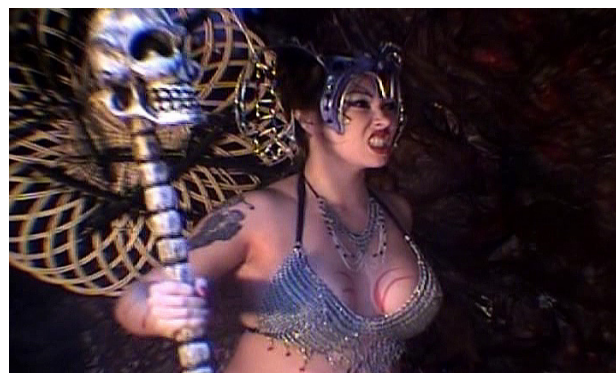
A young scantily-clad tourist is captured by the women and taken back to the cave they are currently living in, but only after being thoroughly fondled. Her sister comes looking for her, hears about the volcano, goes to investigate and is also captured and fondled. The sisters are then forced to fondle each other. You get the general idea. Their god, played by Mr Creepo (fat, middle aged, not at all creepy, and a god-like regalia that consists of two feather dusters) will take both girls as a sacrifice. The volcano erupts, the



Clitorians are killed, the two sisters escape, and Mr Creepo flies off into space.

The jungle scenery consists of a hillside that could be anywhere, with lots of bird shots inter-cut. All other shots seem to be simply camera opportunities for the girls to show off their bodies and, of course, get fondled. The Clitorians range from ugly to very ugly, and apart from running their hands through bucket of entrails and fondling people their role in the film seems to be to grimace occasionally and show their pierced nipples.

The film is one of those pieces that is so badly made that it goes right through "bad" and comes out "hilarious". It sets out to be a Roger Corman-esque B-grade but without Corman's talent and style. It is without a doubt one of the worst films I have seen in a long time but it's that very awfulness that makes it so appealing. I felt like the kangaroo caught in the headlights – I knew it was bad but it was so dealy fascinating that I had to keep watching. It is hard to conceive that such a dreadful film would actually have a blooper reel, but yes, there were even worse bits of the film cit out. Some are quite hilarious; I was laughing most of the time. And I was sober. My recommendation would be to get a few mates and a lot of beer then sit back and enjoy what a total lack of talent can do.



**Tony: London Serial Killer**  
**Eagle Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

A sympathetic serial killer? That's the reaction I had to this offbeat little horror film. Most of its power is due simply to Peter Ferdinando's emotionless depiction of the socially challenged Tony with his bad hair-cut and straggly moustache. He fits well into the grimy, rundown and crime-infested West End of London.

Tony has trouble relating to people. He has been on the dole for twenty years and has never held down a job. His reclusive life in a bleak council flat is only broken by the occasional trip to buy food or the latest violent videotape or porn magazine. He can't even afford prostitutes. It soon becomes obvious that Tony is, despite his handicap, a desperately lonely man. His one attempt at getting a job, at the urging of the Welfare man assigned to his case, lasts for a day. He has no friends or acquaintances

One day he decides to try drugs. A couple of local street hoodlums arrange a supply then invite themselves to his flat where they drink his

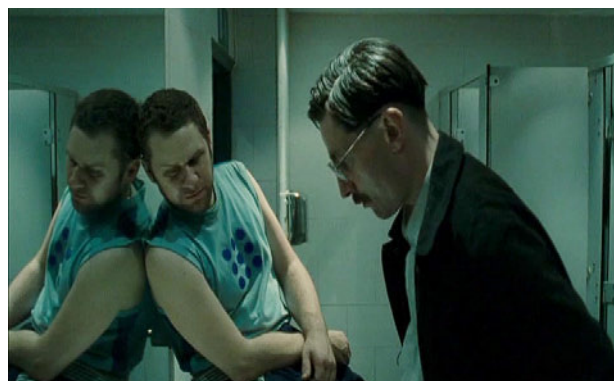


beer and use his dope. Tony smothers one with a plastic bag while the two are passed out. The other escapes. Tony keeps the body of the dead man in his flat for a bit of company but soon the corpse starts to smell. For a while he can blame it on the drains that need fixing, but eventually he has to cut up the body and dispose of the parts. He does this so efficiently and unemotionally that we must now wonder if he has done it before, inspired perhaps by the violent movies he watches.

A gay prostitute, the man who checks the TV licenses – everyone who causes friction in his life is a potential victim. The body count mounts and Tony is now suspected of the kidnapping of a ten year old boy. The boy's father suspects Tony because he is a weirdo and Tony was staring at him in the pub. Since he was arguing loudly with his wife at the time this is not surprising, but in his redneck way he took offence at Tony's interest.

Can Tony's life continue this way? The film leaves us hanging at the end. It is a budget film, but I wish they had a bit more money to continue to a conclusion. Maybe the undecided ending is deliberate, to keep us wondering and use our imaginations to fill in the final scenes. With luck there may be a sequel in the offing.

This is not a horror film in the traditional genre. It is a film, first about lonely people, then about mental instability. There is no character development simply because Tony just doesn't seem to have one. The film is one of those rare ones that, despite the subject, just *could* happen. It offers no solutions to loneliness but is streets ahead of the traditional hack and slash film so common in this genre. A thoughtful horror film? It works, and works well. It is definitely worth viewing.



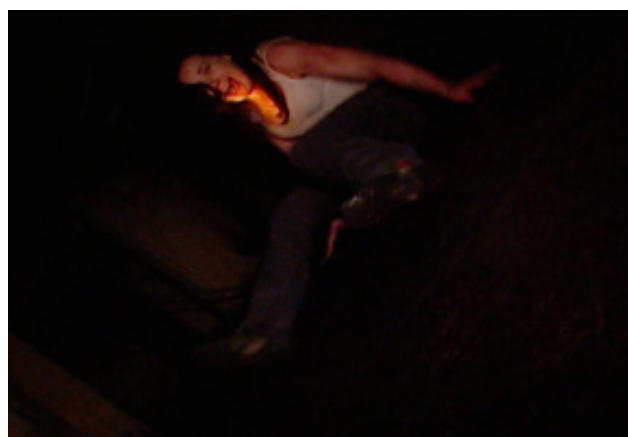


**The Tunnel  
Transmission  
Paramount  
R4 DVD**

Low budget seems to be the way to go for horror these days; it seems to get the creative juices running and offers us films that are innovative and sometimes quite terrifying. The Tunnel is such a film, an Australian original; the producers used a website to sell frames of the film to get the \$135,000 budget. It is quite amazing what they have been able to do with such limited funding. The film has a local cast including Andy Rodoreda, Bel Delia, Steve Davis and Luke Arnold and was directed by Carlo Ledesma.

The film uses standard cinematography, handheld and atmosphere shots to very great effect, the use of darkness, shadows and the cramped size of the underground location also works to exceptional effect. The pseudo-documentary style using supposed original footage, cam shots and government and official recordings add to the sense of reality the film creates. When you add to this a superb soundtrack you have a cracking horror film.

The character development is also solid, exploring the interactions between members of a news crew as they work to find the ultimate story. Natasha Warner is a reporter on the edge; his career hangs on finding just the right story to



make her name. She finds herself reporting on a proposal to use underground water supplies located under Sydney's CBD and then notes that the government drops the whole proposal without explanation. Any enquiry is stone-walled.

She investigates further and begins to hear rumours of homeless people vanishing in the tunnels and access being denied to any reporters. She convinces a crew she had the bosses permission and the right permits to go down to investigate. As they explore this vast underground domain something seems to be watching them; they hear strange sounds and notice movements in the darkness. When Tangles, the soundman goes missing, they realize they are being hunted and will have to fight for their lives to survive. The creature is superb especially considering you cannot really tell what it is, you get a flash here, a shadow there and your imagination does the rest. The blood splatters, eyes on the floor of its nest and watery feeding ground all help create a superbly suspenseful sense of an otherworldly monster but it is not reduce to some silly CGI creation. The hunt through the tunnels is very well done creating a constant sense of dread and many edge of your seat moments.

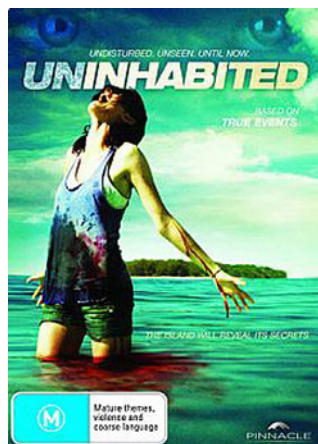
Transmission Films and Paramount Home Entertainment Australia will release The Tunnel on May 19 as a two-disc edition with over two hours of exclusive DVD features including an alternate ending, a behind-the-scenes documentary and other featurettes.

This is indie filmmaking at its best, low budget yet far more satisfying than horror films with ten times the funding. I most highly recommend it.



**Uninhabited**  
**Horror / Thriller**  
**Australia**  
**R4**  
**Pinnacle Films**

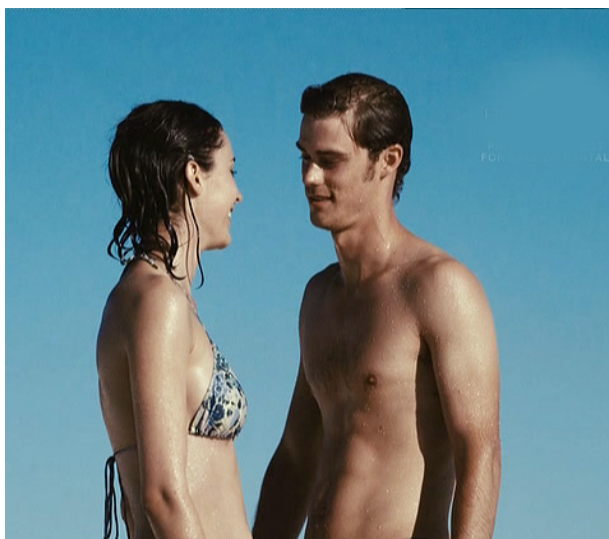
There are hundreds of islands in the Great Barrier Reef chain along the coast of Queensland. Most are beautiful and uninhabited. Or so we believe.



Harry and Beth are having a ten-day holiday on one of the uninhabited islands. On the first day their holiday is every bit as idyllic as they hoped. They fill the day swimming and fishing. Beth teaches Harry about the wonderful fauna of the reef islands – stingrays, sharks, poisonous jellyfish, moray eels, and the deadly stonefish that imitates a piece of coral as it sits on the bottom with its poisonous spines erect. The only curious event is a set of fresh footprints in the sand.

That night they hear strange noises – a woman sobbing, screams and other noises that they put down to the muttonbirds that live on the island. Muttonbirds, though, don't steal clothing from a clothesline or move around the camp at night or film the two sleeping. Harry and Beth are not alone on their island.

One morning a fishing boat turns up off the island. The satphone goes missing so they confront the two fishermen in their camp that evening. In a short fight the fishermen capture the two at gunpoint and tie them up. One is preparing to rape Beth but then the strange noises

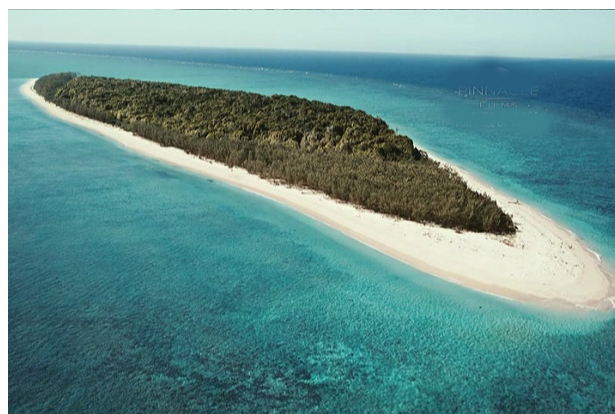


start again. The two men go off into the bush to find out who is making the noise and in the dark both are killed. How? Who is the killer?

There is a clue in an old hut on the island. A journal details how a young girl was savagely raped by five men while she was dying from stepping on a stonefish a hundred years ago. Later entries from successive victims suggest her spirit will take her savage revenge on any male on the island.

From here on Beth and Harry face a battle for survival until the boat comes to take them home. How do you fight a vengeful spirit?

Geraldine Hakewill and Henry James have a reasonable amount of acting experience behind them and it shows in their good performances. Bill Bennett's direction makes the most of a beautiful piece of Australia but the night shots are tense and ominous. Like *The Reef*, this film will do nothing for Queensland's tourist industry.





**We Are What We Are**  
**Horror**  
**Mexico**  
**Hopscotch**  
**R4**

*English subtitles*

This film gives a new meaning to the phrase "family values". It is about a rather dysfunctional family trying to hold their lives together following the death of their father. They are a poor family living in a slum in Mexico City. Life is cheap but living is expensive. The father and his sons are making a small living from a watch and clock repair business but following the father's death the business fails. We see just how little life is regarded when he dies, vomiting some disgusting body fluid on the floor of a shopping mall. The unconcerned cleaners drag the body away to await the police and get on with cleaning up the mess.

It appears he was spending what money there was whoring around. His wife is deeply affected by this and has degenerated to bickering, complaining and criticising anything the sons do to keep together and alive. The youngest son Alfredo takes on the business because his brother is coarse, violent and useless. He also takes an incestuous interest in their sister.

During an autopsy on the father a human finger is found in his digestive tract and now we learn that the family has a dark taboo secret – they are cannibals. The cannibalism is disguised if not justified by a pointless ritual, but it means



that every few days the 'hunter' of the family must go out and find a victim. It falls to Alfredo to take over the role even though he has not been trained. How does he go about it? Where does he find a victim?

Initially he decides on a prostitute. He gets one home but his demented mother with her irrational hatred of prostitutes beats the girl to death then dumps her body on the street in front of the other working girls. With the police and the prostitutes after her the family should lie low but Alfredo decides to keep trying. He picks up a young man in a gay bar, revealing something of his own sexuality. He takes the youth home but he escapes once he finds out what the family has in mind for him. He picks up another one and gets him home to mother, who vows she "will not eat a fag" and kills the youth. There is a family fight and mother is overruled so the two women proceed to butcher the corpse.

The escaped gay youth goes to the police who now close in on the family.

Setting a cannibal film in an urban jungle is an interesting idea. The film is not really judging the family on their cannibalism, simply noting it as their way to survive grinding poverty. I thought this approach lifted the film well above the usual blood and gore spectacular.

This is Jorge Michel Grau's first major independent film. His film comments on poverty, Government indifference, uncontrolled vice and sheer grinding poverty. It is a powerful if shocking drama and with luck we will see more from him.



# **Anti-Nazi Classics** **War** **Germany** **First Run Features** **R1 DVD**

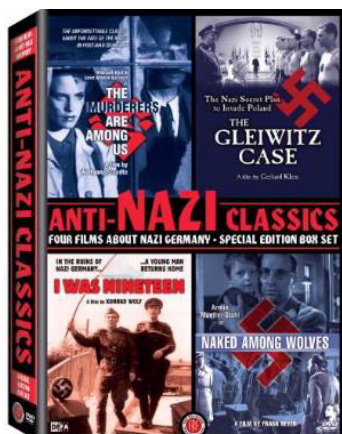
*German with  
 English subtitles*

This set of four films came from the archives of DEFA, the old East German Film Archive. They were made during the period of Russian occupation and were mostly designed as propaganda to highlight to the German people exactly what their government had done in their name during and before the war. The films are sometimes therefore a little heavy handed even as propaganda but they are a valuable historical record of the attitudes of the times. It is not known whether they made the East German people feel guilty or not, but at least most of the films are good entertainment.

The four films selected for this set are masterpieces of their genre, reflecting just how good the German film industry could be. They have all been cleaned up and the sound overhauled and are surprisingly free of the signs of age so common in films of this vintage. It is fortunate that they were taken from the archives rather than reconstructed, as so many older films must be.

## **The Gleiwitz Case (1961)**

*The Gleiwitz Case* (1961) is a dramatised documentary of the dummy raid on a German radio station that Hitler used as his excuse for invading Poland. According to the propaganda of the times a small group of Poles crossed the border and conducted a raid on the Gleiwitz radio station. They broadcast their inflammatory message and then went back to Poland, except for one who was shot by the heroic German po-



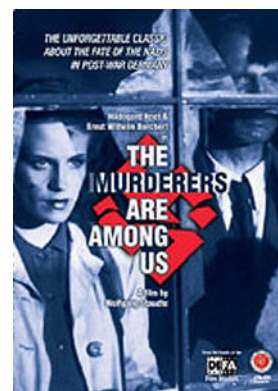
lice.

In fact the whole raid was carefully staged by the Germans as an excuse for the invasion. The German troops were assembled and ready to attack, and were just waiting for the Gleiwitz "attack" to give them the excuse to invade.

The "Poles" were a small group of German students from a nearby SS academy. The dead Pole was a prisoner of war. All weapons, clothes etc were Polish. The film shows in detail the meticulous preparation for the mission and the final action. The aftermath is not covered, as the outcome is well-known – the thoroughly prepared Wehrmacht crossed the border and conquered Poland, thereby starting World War II.

## **The Murderers Are Amongst Us**

This was the first film from the post-war East Germany industry, made by DEFA, the only licensed filmmaker. It was filmed and takes place in 1946 when Berlin was still largely heaps of rubble with the citizens eking out a living as best they could.



Some were doing well out of the needs of post-war Germany. One such is Bruckner, an ex-Army man who now owns a factory employing over a hundred Germans.

One of his ex-soldiers, Dr Mertens, is trying to drown his memories of the massacre of the people of a Polish village at then-Captain Bruckner's orders. Mertens has come back to





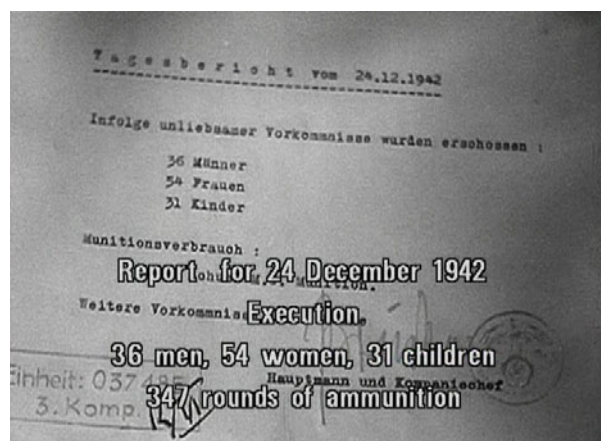
Berlin and moved into an empty apartment. Like most of Berlin the building is damaged – cracked walls, poor facilities and a general air of sadness. This doesn't worry Mertens since he is usually partly drunk. He has given up surgery. He is surprised one day when the original owner of the apartment returns from a concentration camp – a girl named Hildegard. She is somewhat sympathetic to his case and they share the rooms. There are the first signs that they may be falling in love but Mertens is still a broken man wracked with guilt. .

One day while Hildegard is cleaning up the mess left by Mertens she finds a letter addressed to Bruckner's wife to be passed to her in the event of Bruckner's death. Hildegard tracks down Bruckner and he and Mertens meet up again. Bruckner has no idea how much Mertens hates him for turning him into a murderer. Despite his hatred for Bruckner for the murder of the villagers, when Bruckner was injured and about to be left behind by the retreating Germans Mertens gave Bruckner his pistol and took the letter to pass on. Mertens hasn't heard of Bruckner since. Mertens hasn't forgotten the massacre. He plans to kill Bruckner but is divert-



ed at the last minute by a woman's urgent pleas to save her daughter. His medical training and ethics win out over his anger and apathy and he saves the girl. Will that also save Bruckner, still oblivious to what Mertens had planned for him? What of the developing love between Mertens and Hildegard? How much guilt for the massacre should he really be carrying? Should Bruckner be denounced instead as a wartime murderer?

The desolation of a destroyed Berlin is what really gives the film impact. It is hard for people to show their best when all around them is destroyed. The film could have been a propaganda masterpiece but instead it was filmed as a simple human interest love story of two people trying to rebuild their damaged lives in a shattered city. Even the comparison between Mertens' poverty and Bruckner's wealth is not laboured – that's just the way it was. In an entertainment-starved Germany the film was made as entertainment rather than propaganda. The people knew of the profiteers but all they wanted was for life to return to normal as soon as possible.

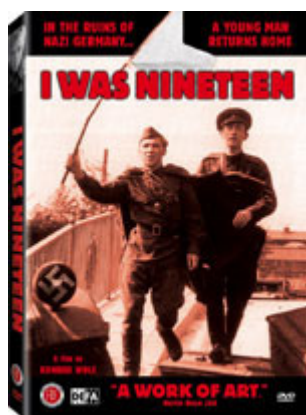




## I Was 19

Konrad Wolf's 1968 film could apply to any young man conscripted into the army in any country but his almost-autobiographical film seems to hold a special depth of feeling. Over the years there have been many films of a young man's experiences in war but too many rely on sensationalised battles for interest. There is little of that here. The "hero", Gregor Heckler, is a soldier in an "agitation unit" in the Soviet army. His job is to broadcast messages to the German troops in battle areas urging them to give up, since the war is all but over anyway. With Berlin surrounded and ready to fall it is senseless to keep on fighting. Heckler is himself German-born, so he is ideal for the broadcast unit. His father took their family to Russia before Hitler took over Germany. Gregor now regards himself as Russian with a German background.

As the Russians advance Gregor, not needed at the time, is left as the Commandant of a German town. Here he experiences the problems of the German people first hand. He meets a young girl who has been evacuated from Berlin but now has nowhere to go and nowhere to sleep. He is unimpressed by the wealthy town mayor who seems to be thriving – obviously a Nazi, although he now denies this. As a lieutenant Gregor is only accustomed to commanding his small group and their broadcasting truck. He learns quickly.



After he is relieved he drives forward to keep up with the front where he may be needed. He sees atrocities committed by both sides. He meets German ex-concentration camp inmates who were imprisoned because they were Communist and even forms a friendship with one. In all these encounters his German background helps him with the difficult problem of communication. That communication encourages empathy between Gregor and the Germans.

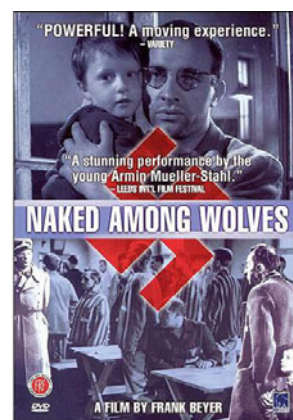
At Spandau fortress a group of Wehrmacht and SS officers is controlling one of the main access roads to Berlin. Heckler's background helps him negotiate their surrender. Again, his experience of the war has been largely non-violent.

At a lonely country farm he persuades a group of escaping Germans to surrender to him and forms a friendship with one of the soldiers. He is gradually becoming more aware of his German-ness and is divided between the two philosophies. He has seen the good and bad side of Nazism, but he has also seen the roughness of the Russians with the Germans – particularly those Russians whose towns and villages were overrun during the German advance on Moscow.

At the end the story is left hanging but we have seen Gregor being influenced by both sides of the conflict. He is emerging as a better man for it.

## Naked Among Wolves

This film views the German and Nazi actions through the eyes of Polish and Communist prisoners in Buchenwald concentration camp. Since the Communists were one of the first groups rounded up by the Nazis some have been in the camp for ten years. In that time they have built up a sort of resistance organization and even collected some guns. They have co-operated with the camp Commandant, an elderly Wehrmacht officer, to the point that the prisoners are allowed to manage themselves as







long as they keep any trouble suppressed. This does not sit well with the SS detachment who do the guard work.

Buchenwald was more of a work camp than an extermination camp so such long times in the camp for the prisoners were quite normal.

Trouble arrives when Jankowski, a Polish internee, transfers into the camp from the Auschwitz extermination camp. In his suitcase he is smuggling a small boy who lost his parents in the Warsaw ghetto uprising. Those who know of the little boy immediately adopt him but must keep him hidden from the Germans. He is precious to a group of lonely men who have lost their own children and families.

As the Allies close in on the camp the SS is desperate to eradicate any sign of the atrocities they have committed. They can only move about 10,000 inmates. The rest will be slaughtered and buried in a nearby forest. The little boy is betrayed and he becomes a rallying point for the resistance. He is moved from hiding place to hiding place one jump ahead of the guards, while the inmates prepare for a battle with the SS guards rather than be deported or killed. They are ill prepared for a battle against professional soldiers so they stake it all on a



final do-or-die effort, based on wireless reports that the Allies are closing in. If they are right, they and the boy may survive. If they are wrong they will all be killed in pointless resistance.

The film is excellent for its entire length. There are great performances by all the leading actors. The propaganda view of the evil SS is strongly made but not overemphasised.

The film is based on a book by a prisoner. The episode of the boy is supposed to be true – he was apparently kept hidden for three years despite the Germans trying everything to find him. The film was made in 1963 and looks like part of the campaign to remind the East Germans of what their support of Hitler had cost. It was the first German film to focus on the concentration camps. Most Germans were by now aware of the camps and their dreadful task, but the graphic nature of the film was a good reminder. The film is surprisingly free of unnecessary blood and gore, considering that it deals with physical torture and violent death. This restraint leaves the violence to the imagination, which perhaps makes the film more effective. Even so, little is made of the starvation diet, the brutality and sickness that were features of day to day living in the camp.

There is a distinct impression that things would be worse if it wasn't for the brave comrades holding the camp together until liberation. Another interesting area that is rarely explored is the concern of the Germans to appear humane when they are captured. The German soldiers want to win favour by being kinder to the prisoners; the SS simply want to get rid of any inconvenient witnesses to their brutality.

This is perhaps the most powerful film in the set.

## Behind The Burly Q First Run Features R1 DVD

Until they were overtaken by nudity in film and home videotape, the Burlesque shows were a major form of entertainment for American audiences. Say "Burlesque" and most people will think of leggy chorus lines and nude main acts, but this was far from the truth. They drew a lot from music hall entertainment and the program would include singing, dancing, magic acts, comedy routines and even acrobats. Many shows were run at theatres in the main cities but the shows would also go on tour.

They usually began with an extended opening sequence of song and dance and briefly clad chorus line girls to soften up the audience for the acts to follow. A good comedy routine always went over well and many film comedians got their start in Burlesque. Lou Costello was one who succeeded, but there were also those who never made the change, preferring the Burlesque stage to the camera. But it was the girls that the audiences wanted to see. The main striptease acts ranged from tasteful to salacious, but full nudity was frowned on.

The girls came from a wide range of social levels but most had poor or underprivileged backgrounds. Surprisingly perhaps, most of the girls' parents did not disapprove. The girls were usually closely supervised during the shows. A bit of light flirting with the clientele was OK, but lining up customers for prostitution was out – and so was the girl.

Much of the documentary is built around the memories of the retired stars and their reminiscences. Some remember the times well and are quite well spoken, but there was often a touch of bitchiness about those dancers who would steal an act or copy a costume from another performer. Each dancer was expected to have a different act and a gimmick to bring in the audiences. The pay rate for a good performer was fairly generous for those days.



They travelled together, usually on trains, with the crew, the chorus line girls and all the equipment they needed to put on a show. They would all chip in to pay the wages of a wardrobe lady who would clean and press the costumes, repair them when necessary, and take the clothing from the performers as they disrobed on stage. Most girls had two trunks to travel with – one for their personal items, one for their costumes.

Burlesque thrived during and just after World War II when it was one of the few forms of entertainment available for returned servicemen. It was gradually replaced by the new naughty films that were coming in from Europe and by the Peepshow reels that were more widely available. A Burlesque show on tour still drew great audiences but there wasn't much new talent coming in. The shows just faded away.

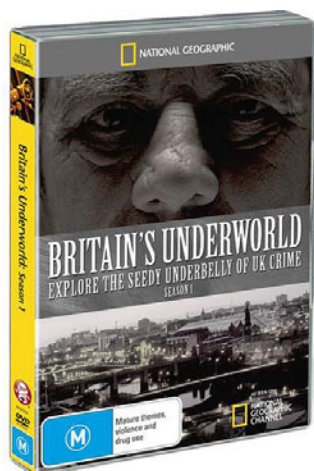
The DVD has many hundreds of clips and stills of the performers and the shows, as well as interviews with the performers. The extras are well worth looking at with extended interviews, costumes and a timeline.



# Britain's Underworld Part 1 National Geographic Madman R4 DVD

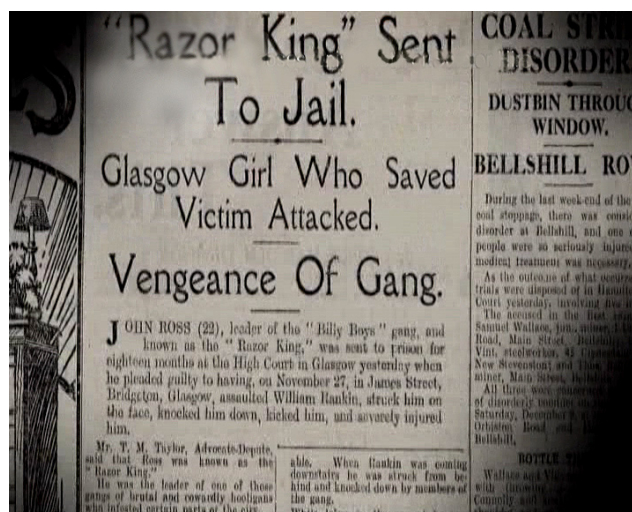
We tend to look at British crime based on what we see in their films. The Agatha Christie stories were genteel and there was no "organised" crime as such. Even later films like Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels had few "real" gangsters as such. There was the occasional darker film like Essex Boys but they were in the minority since their stories involved criminal gangs, drugs and guns. This just wasn't seen as terribly British. Now with independent filmmakers making crime films the grittier side of British crime is being brought out into the open. Even so, some of the stories are just too farfetched to be credible. Or are they?

In this documentary series we follow the rise of crime gangs in three British cities – Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool. These gangs go back to the 1920s – 1930s and were usually a reaction to unemployment, underprivilege and social inequality. Money could lift you out of poverty and it was there for the taking from the rich. One early source of money for instance was by holding up the bookmakers – called "taxing". In a plasticless society cash was plenti-



ful if you had the guts to take it.

Arthur Johnson came to dominate Glasgow crime. He started with protection rackets but he was always willing to try something new like safecracking. When the huge profits of drugs were realised the gangs naturally moved into the new area. Glasgow had a major heroin





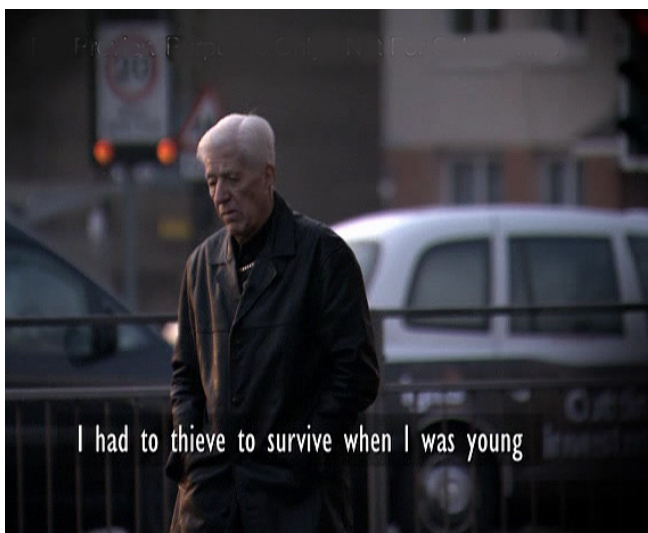


problem by 1983, bigger than most of the rest of Britain. Glasgow gangs became known as the McMafia.

Liverpool had its share of small gangs. A young black man named Michael Showers developed Britain's drug market by directly importing drugs from Africa and Central America through the docks of Liverpool. The city soon had a third of all drug arrests in Britain. The new pop culture was a ready market for marijuana, heroin and cocaine. The police, although aware of what had happened in other cities, did not form a Vice Squad to fight the problem until 1966.

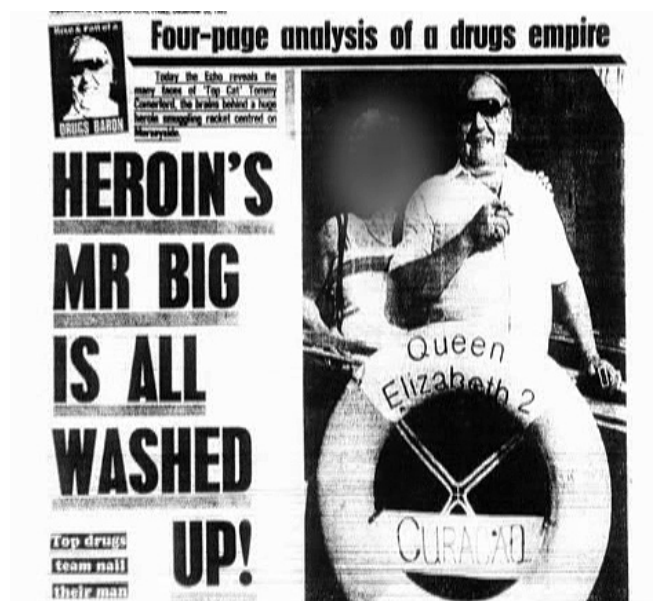
Manchester gangs were so violent the city became known as "Gunchester". It was the scene of gang wars that until recently had lasted through two decades of killings. A police officer recalls that his squad was investigating eight murders that were committed on just one weekend.

Once again the gangs grew from the overcrowding and poverty. Street gangs formed and as the Depression took hold robberies increased. Jim-



my The Weed (so called because he grew on you) started his career by breaking into a chocolate factory while he was still at school. In his teens he graduated to stealing meat and fish from the markets. Gradually as the gang he ran with became more violent and more members spent time in prison it became known as the Quality Street Gang. It was named after a popular brand of chocolates advertised by a group of comedy villains. There was nothing comedic about the QSG, though. They were quite prepared to use violence if needed – knives, razors – but no guns as yet.

In an effort to get gambling off the streets the government licensed betting shops and casinos. These were a lucrative source of protection money and attracted the attention of Lon-

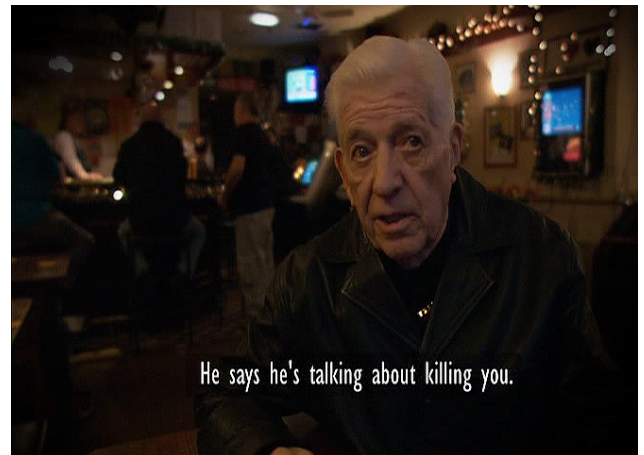






don's Kray Twins, two of Britain's most vicious gangsters. The local club owners were more scared of the Krays than the local gangs, with whom they had reached a non-violent level of near-cooperation. They informed both the police and the local gangs of the Krays' attempts to move in on a local club. The Krays were threatened by both the police and the gangs. Against the combination of cops and crims, the Krays knew they couldn't get into Manchester.

The gangs moved into property, the car parts trade (stripping stolen cars) and rigged boxing matches. There was still violence between the gangs, though. Local silence made it almost impossible for the police to get convictions against the QSG. The gang started using guns for armed hold-ups of wages and security vans. From the 1980s drugs, as usual, became a main source of revenue. Their main area of influence was Moss Side, a two square km suburb with a 30% unemployment rate and 9,000 people. It became the main drug distribution centre for Britain with drugs being sold openly on street corners. The QSG gang was finally



broken when one of the members turned informer on the gang.

For the remaining gangs and the new gangs guns came into wide use to protect territories and to fight a new group, the HillBillies, led by White Tony. White Tony was killed in a gang ambush – probably by his own gang who were concerned that he had no respect for others in the gang and that his behaviour was becoming irrationally violent.

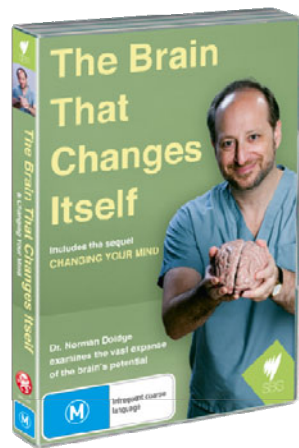
The police were becoming more cunning in their operations. They set up in one building as disguised as homeless squatters and for five weeks they filmed gang members openly dealing heroin on the streets. Then they pounced and arrested a generation of Moss Side dealers in early dawn raids. Other gangs, as usual, sprang up to fill the void but the police were finally getting successes in court.

The series highlights the causes of the crime gangs as well as their leading figures. Surprisingly the producers have been able to get some of the criminals themselves to talk about their past and the history of their gangs. Interviews with retired police officers give us the other side of the story and show the quiet desperation of the police as they tried to deal with the unaccustomed gang problem. Newspapers of the day show how the gangs affected public confidence.

With this detailed examination of the problem we must now look at British crime stories from a better-informed point of view. The lessons to be learned and the problems to be addressed are still there.

## The Brain that Changes Itself Madman R4 DVD

We love docos at Synergy but most of them do tend to be about nature, technology and history, that's fine, we love those subjects but it is great to see a documentary which is totally different and very thought provoking. Psychology is such a fascinating field and theories of the development of the human brain even more so. The Brain that Changes itself is a superb documentary with a lot to say.



Traditionally the brain was seen as an organ that developed like most others in the human body, when it reached a certain age it was pretty well unchangeable. This view was the orthodox scientific view since the very earliest days of medicine and meant that when a brain injury occurred little could be done and sadly little was attempted. It also meant that it was believed that when a person started to lose focus later in life there was little that could be done about that either, so many elderly people were left mentally decaying with little action taken. Medications and other forms of interventions were sometimes attempted but with too few successful results.

*The Brain that Changes Itself* documents a new paradigm that has arisen in brain research known as brain plasticity or neuroplasticity. Essentially this means that the brain can be retrained (not without some hardwork) if damaged and if it is losing focus. If standard pathways to the brain are not working, then new ones can be formed and through a range of techniques the brain can be modified to use its many unused regions to "take up the slack".

The example given in the book is that if the brain uses major highways, if these are blocked or damaged, we can take backroads or even create a cross country path to get where need to go. The more these new paths are used the more successful they become.

These studies began in the Sixties and have



had immense changes to the way in which stroke victims and those with brain injuries or damage are treated.

The medical establishment was slow to catch on due to the sheer radicalness of the proposal. The concept of the static brain was the foundation of the basic approach to so many diseases that this new paradigm, with wildly successful results, came as quite a shock.

At the same time this discovery has far more significant ramifications that purely in the medical field. If the brain can be trained it can be kept in an optimum state and the documentary discusses a range of techniques for keeping the brain "taut and trim" even into old age. Such techniques can also be used for those with mind fog caused by medication, learning difficulties and forms of autism. There are now a wide range of brain training programs available in print, on DVD and online which can be used and have proven effectiveness, rather than using medication it does seem exercising the brain like a muscle is the way to go.

There are now schools using these techniques to assist children with learning disorders and many people are using online courses to keep their minds in shape. This is a superb DVD which educates us about the latest research in brain plasticity and challenges us to use our brains – "if you don't use it, you'll lose it". It also includes the sequel *Changing your Mind*.

*The Brain that Changes Itself* is also available as a book, written by Norman Doidge and published by Penguin, it was a New York Times bestseller.



**Charles Bean's  
Great War  
SBS Australia  
Madman  
R4 DVD**

In this well-deserved documentary we see the history of one of Australia's great men, Charles Bean. At the opening of World War 1 the Australian military appointed him to report on the actions of Australian troops in the overseas theatres of war. He was given the honorary rank of Captain. The British had their own war correspondents but their flowery jingoistic style contained propaganda messages of patriotism and heroism but little of fact. The Australians back home wanted to know what was really happening to their sons.



Bean reported the facts as he saw them. In one dispatch he commented on the drunken loutish behaviour of the Australians in Cairo. This did not make him many friends, but it was at the Gallipoli landing that he came into his own. He went ashore with the troops in the first few hours of the landing and was able to report accurately on the shambles of the early battle. He rescued an injured soldier, and managed to get himself shot by a Turk while doing so.

He carried the bullet in his leg to his death. He was recommended for an award for this action but because he was only an honorary soldier he was not eligible.

Bean managed to make friends among the troops and got their impressions first hand. He



developed his own style of reporting – an overview of the battle, details of individual skirmishes, and often the experiences of a small group of the men involved. He was able to do this effectively because the Australian contingent was comparatively small. He became a familiar figure to the troops as he wandered around with notebook and camera in hand. By contrast the British correspondent stayed on board the ships at Gallipoli and provided the standard heroic descriptions based on what he could see through a telescope.

Bean reported accurately and without fear or favour. This got him into trouble with the higher-ups, both for highlighting the errors of the military staff and because his style was too dry and factual, not the florid jingoistic style of the British correspondents. In fact many of his dispatches were regarded by the newspapers as downright boring, no matter how detailed, and they used the British reports instead. His notes, photos and dispatches are of great historical value, though, because they present an accurate on-the-spot report of the battles.

When Gallipoli was abandoned in 1916 and the troops moved to the Western Front and its dreadful trench warfare Bean went with the Australians. Somewhere about this time, after the costly Battle of Pozieres, he conceived an idea that was to truly commemorate the soldiers lost in battle – an Australian War Memorial. He got a sympathetic reception to the idea and began collecting relics of the battles that formed the nucleus of the War Memorial collec-





tion in years to come. The idea became so popular that the military appointed John Treloar, later to become the Memorial's Director, as head of the new Australian War Records Section. His job was to amass the records, unit notebooks and diaries of the units, and historical relics for the proposed Memorial. With help from the soldiers themselves the Section amassed a collection of over 25,000 relics and contributed to improving the quality of the unit diaries so they could be used as a historical resource. Note the word "relics" – Bean did not believe in the British system of collecting trophies of victories and ignoring the losses. He felt a true historical record would include details of all actions, won or lost, as accurately as possible. The relics were there to support this

Bean also photographed and painted the war extensively with the help of a number of specialist artists and photographers. He wanted the records, like the despatches, to truly reflect what was happening at the time. In this he differed with the British official historian who commented that "The general tone of Bean's narrative is deplorable from the Imperial standpoint". This apparently meant that he was not following the official British line as to how the history of the war was to be presented and was not afraid to detail the shortcomings of the Imperial General

Staff. He said of the general Staff "The British nation has not the brains to make war. It's much better at manufacturing socks."

After the War the government appointed him to edit the 12-volume Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918, much of which was written by him. It took years to get access to the British records. Some people had long memories and knew the British would not be treated well in parts of the colonial history.

The War Memorial project ran straight into the Depression and funds were limited, but to the credit of successive governments they got enough money from somewhere and work commenced. As well as the valuable archives the Memorial contains a shrine and a museum. Although originally intended as a memorial to the fallen of World War 1, with the outbreak of World War 2 it became obvious that other wars were going to have to be included. It is now a central archive and museum for every conflict in which Australians fought up to the wars in south east Asia.

The names of every fallen Australian soldier are engraved on the walls of the cloisters around the Pool of Remembrance and at the head of the Pool is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. As Bean said, "Many a man lying out there at Pozieres or in the low scrub at Gallipoli, with his poor tired senses barely working through the fever of his brain, has thought in his last moments: "Well – well – it's over; but in Australia they will be proud of this."

Although Bean's uncooperative approach to the British historians may have cost him a decoration from King George V, he was offered a Knighthood by his grateful government. Bean turned it down – three times. As much as any man he led Australia towards independence from Britain and helped unite the colonies into a single country. The Australian War Memorial centralised the war history and was one of the first tangible signs that Australia was no longer a collection of colonies.

The Memorial is a great monument to the fallen soldiers but is also a monument to Bean's vision and patriotism. The documentary re-enacts many of the scenes from his life, based on his photos and notes. It is a comprehensive tribute to a good Australian.



**Erasing David**  
Antidote Films  
Pinnacle Films  
R4 DVD

Britain is the world's third most intrusive country into its citizens' private information, following China and Russia. Myriad databases keep track of every possible piece of information on a citizen from their shopping preferences to their family history. How much of this information is really needed?

How much interdependence of the databases is safe or desirable? How long is the information kept? Although we are assured that if you have nothing to hide then you have nothing to fear, recent break-ins to databases mean the information is now available for nefarious uses like identity theft and credit card fraud. David Bond's alternative interpretation is *'He has nothing to hide but does he really have nothing to fear?'*

David is concerned about the gradual erosion of his privacy and personal details by the amount of information required just to survive in the modern world.

The registration of the birth of his daughter revealed large amounts of probably unnecessary information were being collected just from this simple exercise. With his wife heavily pregnant, the local hospital revealed they had most records of his family's medical treatment and earlier records could be readily obtained. Amazon had vast amounts of information based on his purchases – who he had sent gifts to, his own preferences in reading, responses to advertising campaigns.



He decided to try to escape from the database world and "disappear" from the electronic society for a month. To find out how easily he could be tracked electronically from information on the databases he hired Cerberus Security to try to find him within the month.

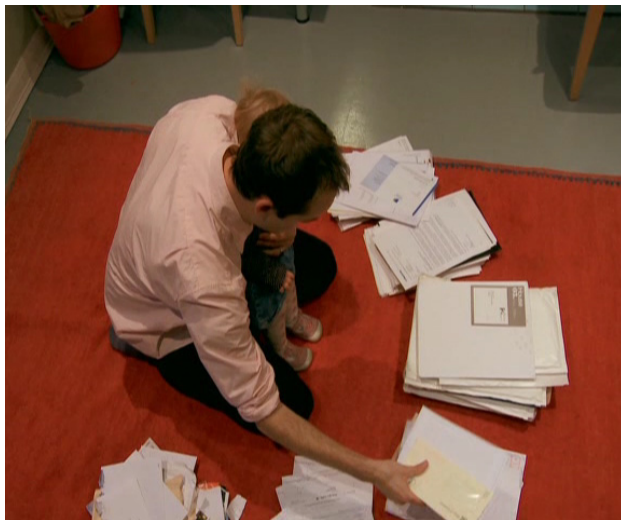
In his search for privacy we see a growing paranoia in David. He must consider every move he makes, every phone call to his wife, every use of his credit card. Any mistake can be used by Cerberus to close in on him.

On the one hand it is fascinating to see how he tries to evade his pursuers, but on the other hand it is equally interesting to see just how comprehensive a dossier his pursuers can put together on him from the various databases and other sources. Inadvertently he leaves the investigators a couple of loopholes. His mobile CAN be tracked and they do so during a call he makes from Germany to his wife.

They raid his garbage and check him out on the Internet and find out his family members' names and that his wife is pregnant. They also learn his car registration and insurance details and his credit card number from the garbage. Facebook provides a photo of him. When he returns

to Britain it is likely that he will seek refuge with his parents.

Cerberus find his parents' addresses from various databases. They have the information right, but they get to his father's home just a bit too late. The hospital seems the next likely target since his wife will be attending for check-ups. Will he turn up with her? By pretending to be David one of the investigators is able to find out the date of the next appointment with a simple phone call. The National Health Service has been criticised for years about their lax security over personal data kept on their patients and

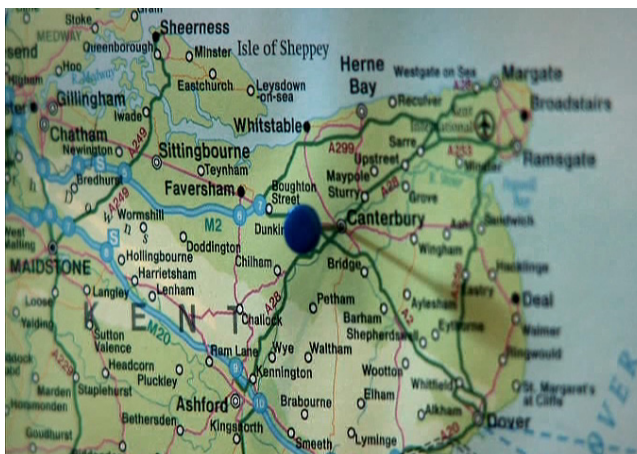


that attitude still exists.

David in his loneliness becomes more and more paranoid. He tears his equipment apart looking for a tracking bug which he feels sure Cerberus has planted on him. The occasional brief call to his wife (he knows the mobile calls can be traced) is little consolation. He is finally forced to break cover when his wife tells him she may have pneumonia. He meets her at the hospital, hoping he is still ahead of Cerberus.

At each step David details the information kept on him by the various organisations he comes in contact with. He also documents newer invasions of privacy such as a fingerprint reader system and database to monitor the attendance of children in school classes.

In the battle between rights and responsibilities the rights of the individual are being eroded at every turn. Where does it end?



## Living in Emergency: Stories of Doctors Without Borders Documentary First Run Features R1 DVD

Medecins sans Frontieres is a charity group that supplies doctors, hospitals and medical facilities to countries in desperate need because of civil war or other disaster.



Doctors volunteer their time, sometimes for years, simply because they feel the need to use their skills to relieve the medical problems. This takes more skill than might be expected. One Australian doctor compares it to medicine in his father's day (he was a doctor too). Shortages of the drugs they are used to, primitive surgical facilities, major trauma problems like gunshot wounds – a doctor will see all of these in a short time. Other problems include the language difficulties, stress and burnout, the fear of local people who have never seen a doctor before, and personality clashes between tired staff. And there is always, in the background, the risk of typhoid or Lassa Fever or worse. This work should properly be the work of the U.N but as one doctor points out they are good at devising plans that may take a few years to put into place. The people need doctors NOW. With no political or religious ties MSF can move quickly into a troubled area and start work.







The story focuses on four doctors and their experiences in Liberia and the Congo. What they can do with their limited facilities is brilliant. We see a doctor carefully squeezing a herniated intestine the size of a soccer ball back into a woman's abdomen. An ulcerated foot is now so badly infected that an amputation with minimal tools is the only answer. A man has a hole drilled into his skull to relieve the pressure caused by internal bleeding, and miraculously regains his lucidity and memory as the pressure in his skull drops. We see the failures, too. A little boy is badly bloated, possibly due to kidney, liver or renal failure. They do not have the drugs to treat him or a lab to do tests, so he can only be returned to his mother to see if he lives or dies.

"There are a lot of people you couldn't help, and you just have to get used to that." - Dr Chris Brasher

There are rare moments of humour, too. The bloated little boy starts farting violently and overnight much of the swelling goes down. Another little boy tells his doctor he should give up smoking (he did give it up).

In countries with minimal health and hygiene facilities to start with, a war is a medical load that is not needed. Nevertheless in countries like the Congo 250,000 people have already died in the violence. This could be dramatically reduced by adequate medical care but MSF's funding simply doesn't allow them to be everywhere they are needed.

When do you close a hospital? Funding means that a unit must be closed within a few months of the end of the emergency even though the doctors know full well that their services are still desperately needed. No matter how much still needs to be done, there will be another trouble spot where they are now needed even more.

The constant frustration seems to take its toll on the doctors. Few will return for a second tour with MSF. As the doctors relate their experiences and discuss their feelings we can see why.

The documentary shows in detail the lives of these hard-working men and women. It is far more than the brief mention given to MSF in the TV news. I have nothing but respect for them.



**Man Vs Wild  
Season 1  
Limited Edition  
Steel Book  
Magna Home  
Entertainment  
R4 DVD**

Bear Grylls has become quite a phenomena mixing informative educational content with high action entertainment. His first series had 15 episodes and set the stage for his skyrocketing success with a further six seasons thus far and no sign of the series ending soon. His experience as a foreign legion soldier, mountaineer and adventurer mixed with the ability to entertain has made this one of the most successful series of its type.

Grylls mixes together a unique range of elements to make a show which is compelling viewing for both the teen and adult audience. The mixture of wild and untamed locations which come with breathtaking views and amazing environmental photography mixed with the adrenaline pumping risk of getting there begins most episodes. Grylls then tackles "survival style" living in these environments while at the same time offering suggestions, hints and some skills in survival. One of the more visceral aspects of the series is the "yuck" factor (which, of course, kids love), there is where Grylls eats all manner of disgusting food to survive. This element adds an extra punch to the series, it is often fun, usually a bit revolting but always fascinating. By bringing together all these elements with lots of bravado Bear Grylls has created a unique niche all of his own.

There has as the series developed been criticism that all his resourcefulness is not "real" and that he spends nights in motels. I think this criticism is misplaced at it misunderstands the new medium of "edutainment". Grylls brings together the best techniques used in films to create an "experience", whether this is actually in full real time is irrelevant. Every TV program is edited from a gameshow to a news broadcast and the success of the series is its ability to communicate. The sheer number of people who watch Man Vs Wild tells you what most people think of



it. Grylls was the youngest person to reach the summit of Mount Everest at the age of 23 so I don't think you can question his skills or fitness ! Men want to look like him and boys want to be him, he inspires and entertains.

Man Vs Wild, however, is more than just bravado or entertainment. There are a large number of people who become lost and die in the wilderness each year, so often this is because they are either not prepared or do not know how to survive. Man Vs Wild uses unusual situations, sometimes exaggerated, which stick in the mind and hence may have a lifesaving influence if someone finds themselves lost. Hints on water, food, environment, weather, direction, protection from the elements, all are covered in an interesting manner. While this approach may be different from "old school" forms of documentary making, it does have a high success rate with teens and youngsters. Bear Grylls has become somewhat of a celebrity with young male teens and if this role teaches them a little about how to survive in nature while entertaining them then he had done a good job.



## The Nature of Existence

### Walking Shadows

Region 0 DVD

Web: <http://thenatureofexistence.com>

The Nature of Existence is the documentary of Roger Nygard's search for meaning. In this documentary he attempts to find answers to a wide range of existential questions including why we are here and what the meaning of life is supposed to be. He begins with a series of basic questions and visits a range of supposed authorities and put these questions to them. I use the term supposed because Nygard doesn't really differentiate between the respected and the obviously disturbed, the fundamentalist and the scientific. I do appreciate that he is simply documenting a journey and allowing everyone to have their say and this is entertaining, educating and amusing, but at the times the movement from the sublime to the utterly ridiculous is a bit jarring. He then decides to take his questions around the world and visits Israel, China and India.

He focuses in on a range of specific subjects include the nature of existence and purpose, religion and general spirituality, truth, faith, sin, sexuality, prayer and so on. The answers provides range from the traditionally religious through to the scientific and psychological, he also interviews more radical religious thinkers such as progressive Christians, Peter Gilmore, the leader of the Church of Satan and various Druids and pagans.

It is surprising how narrow nearly all the Christian and traditional religious sound, regardless of their traditions. There are over 100 individuals interviews including like Harvard psychologist Daniel Gilbert (Stumbling on Happiness), film director Irvin Kershner (Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back), novelist and Mormon Orson Scott Card (Ender's Game), and Stonehenge Druids Rollo Maughfling and King Arthur Pendragon.

The film is fast paced and only gives you a taste of the opinions of each person, this is supplemented by a second DVD with over 110 minutes of bonus material. If this is not enough there is a 7 DVD Companion series which overs over 14 hours of interviews and materials. The film itself is so fast paced that you do not really get a sense of what the individual authorities are explaining nor their developed opinions, I person-



ally think less people and more intense interviews would have been better but this has been done in the bonus features and the simply huge Companion Collection.

It is difficult to know how to respond to this series, it certainly brings together a large collection of interviews with major figures, religious (mainstream and alternative) and scientific and gives them free reign to express their opinions. At the same time I came away somewhat dissatisfied, there was no real conclusion except a call to feel good tolerance, considering the risk that religious fundamentalism is posing to the world I do not think we can simply be blasé about such matters.

I believe there is a need to critically engage with the material presented and while the commentator has a good sense of humour and some level of wit I did come away wondering what the significance of the series was. In the end it certainly did not really offer an answer to the question of The Nature of Existence.

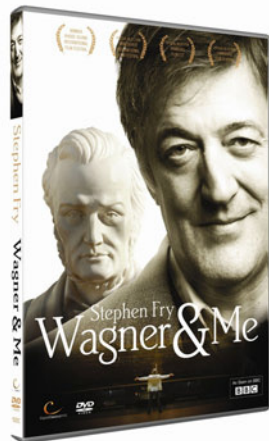
The Companion Series is on 7 DVDs and also available from the website.

**Wagner And Me**  
**Documentary**  
**Antidote Films**  
**Pinnacle Films**  
**R4 DVD**

I approached this film with trepidation. I am not an opera fan – large people screeching and groaning through unintelligible songs don't do it for me.

Neither am I a Steven Fry fan. His delivery is pompous and annoying, much like Top Gear's Jeremy Clarkson but without the style, class and fast cars. I was forcibly subjected to Torture By Wagner in high school music classes and that put me off classical music for a long time.

Through this enlightening documentary I have now changed my opinions somewhat. Steven Fry avoids pomposity this time as he narrates the story and lets his love for Wagner and his works show through. There is something quite persuasive about listening to an expert discussing a topic he loves – he can impart his enthusiasm to a listener far better than an ordinary lecturer (or music teacher) could. As Fry takes us through Wagner's life he doesn't gloss over the nasty bits, either. Wagner was a small ugly womaniser, a parasite on rich men, and seems to have been filled with a sense of his own importance. As Fry takes us through some of his scores (of his music, not his women) I can't help but admire the skill of a man who can take a complex organism like an orchestra, add singers, combine them all in his mind, plot the music



for each instrument and produce some of the great classic works of music. His patron, King Ludwig of Bavaria, must have been pleased. The Ring Cycle, regarded as his greatest work, runs for around eighteen hours but took nearly twenty years to write. Tristan and Isolde and Parsifal are other Wagner favourites.

Wagner's most unfortunate characteristic was his vicious anti-Semitism. This made him highly acceptable later to the Nazi Party and they used his rousing music for their great rallies and parades. Hitler was such an admirer that he had his sculptor make a bust of Wagner for the Bayreuth concert hall which Wagner had commissioned. This use of his music is still controversial today and most of his works are presented in a modernised style to overcome any hint of Naziism.

Wagner intended his work to be more than an opera or a symphonic piece. His operas were based on the Greek tragedies he admired – a combination of music, drama, song and stage acting. The massive machinery behind and under the Bayreuth stage for moving scenery and equipment shows how much the presentation counted in his work. He didn't just use painted backdrops, his scenery was multi-level. This really gave the singers a number of stages to work on and made the presentations larger than life, or at least larger than anything seen before.

Bayreuth holds an annual Wagner festival and this is the culmination of Fry's presentation. By this point in the documentary I could see the attraction that Wagner's work had. Each festival must be a major part of a music lover's life, as it is for Fry. I still haven't changed my opinions entirely, but at least I now better understand Richard Wagner and his success





**The Walking Dead  
Girls  
Zombie  
Documentary  
Cheezy Flicks  
R1 DVD**



The phenomenon of Stripper Zombies (“zimbies”) and a new film called Stripperland are the main motivations of this documentary. The film apparently has nothing to do with the Japanese Zombie Strippers film made some years ago and reviewed in Synergy.

The bulk of the documentary was filmed at the ZomBcon convention in 2010. It consists of interviews by the unlikely-named Luna Moon with some of the greats of the zombie genre, the actresses and actors, and promo for the previously mentioned film. Thousands of people attended, showing the level of obsession with the living dead in U.S. film.

Regardless of its minor advertising content the documentary is still a fascinating look at the industry through the eyes of people like George Romero, Lloyd Kaufman, Bruce Campbell, John Amplas, Linnea Quigley, and even a group of models hamming it up for a Cheezy Flicks zombie calendar.

Producers and directors like Lloyd Kaufman and George Romero take their subject seriously, but only from the film production angle. Producer John Amplas is an Associate Professor in Drama at Pittsburgh University and looks at his sub-



ject from an academic viewpoint as well as a way to make a living. He did, however, get a bit carried away with vampires rather than zombies, showing where his interest lie. Lloyd Kaufman let slip that he acts in most of his own films because Union labour costs too much for a low-budget film.

The wider exposure of the films is also a sore point. When President Clinton removed the law preventing TV networks from “vertically integrating”, only showing their own productions, it cut out the main market for small independent producers and distributors. The situation has now improved with the voracious demands of cable TV for content, but until this happened Troma’s Toxic Avenger series and Poultrygeist were only shown in small theatres.

Many actors and actresses regard the films as a bit of fun, although some have difficulty expressing that feeling.

*“...cause I was like oh my God you know...” – Linnea Quigley demonstrating her command of English*

Bruce Campbell may have been having a bad day at ZomBcon. His attitude to the genre is rather harsh and unforgiving, considering the money he has made from it.

*“What would be your favourite zombie movie?”  
“It would be the one where I run away and throw fans in front of the zombies and they all get killed and I survive” – Bruce Campbell*

On killing zombies:

*“Apparently it’s all about making them no longer mobile. ....I’m not afraid of zombies. They’re stupid, they smell bad, you can’t talk to ‘em and they can’t go very fast” – Bruce Campbell*

The Zombie Walk phenomenon was a parade of over a thousand people from the convention who dressed as zombies and paraded through the streets. There was also a Zombie Prom where young ladies could wear their favourite Prom dress while dressed as a zombie. All rather sad, really, but at least these people enjoy themselves.

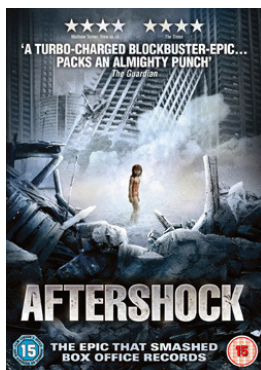
**Aftershock**  
**R4**  
**Pinnacle Films**

*Chinese,  
 English subtitles*

At 4 a.m. on July 28, 1976 a massive earthquake destroyed the city of Tangshan in northern China. Estimates vary but over 240,000 people died – perhaps the highest death toll of any known earthquake. Thirty two years later the government of the rebuilt city asked Director Xiaogang Feng to commemorate the tragedy on film, as a tribute to the dead and injured. He based the film on a book by Zang Ling. The result is a truly epic and memorable film about the aftermath of this great tragedy.

If you are expecting the conventional American disaster epic you will be disappointed. The earthquake itself only takes a few minutes at the start of the film. The rest is dedicated to showing the anguish of the survivors and the tremendous social upheaval such an event causes. In particular, we follow the story of one little girl, one of the 4,200 left orphaned by the quake.

The girl's mother, Ni Yuan, finds her husband dead after the quake and her twin children, the girl Fang Deng and the boy Fang Da, trapped by a fallen slab of concrete. The rescuers tell her that lifting the slab to save one child will crush the remaining child. She is faced with the dreadful dilemma – the choice of life and death for her children. Hysterical, she chooses to have the boy saved. He will need to have his arm amputated but is otherwise OK. His sister hears



her mother make the decision. The body of little Fang Deng is later removed from the rubble and placed with other bodies for burial. In the rain, she revives from her comatose state with a severe memory loss.

The Peoples Liberation Army quickly moves in to save the living. They had been warned by seismologists of an impending earthquake and were ready to go. Ni Yuan and Fang Da are sent to the city where Ni Yuan's mother lives. Fang Deng, separated from them, is regarded as an orphan. She is adopted by a kindly couple from the Army whose son has died, and gradually as her memory returns she comes to regard the loving couple as her new father and mother.







She also remembers her mother's decision and makes no effort to track down Ni Yuan. She goes to college intending to become a doctor but just before her final year she falls pregnant to another student. Eventually she marries a Canadian man and moves to Canada.

Meanwhile the boy Fang Da is growing up with the handicap of only one arm. His mother is insistent that he should get an education but Fang Da has a strong independent streak and moves to a major city in a make-or-break effort to forge a life for himself. Ni Yuan, mentally broken, is supporting herself by dressmaking but it is a lonely life. Fang Da succeeds in business and meets a girl he wants to marry. Ni Yuan's happiness increases but she is still haunted by the death of her husband and daughter. She visits their grave every year and tells their spirits where she now lives so they will be able to find their way back to her.

In 2008 another major earthquake hits Szechuan province. Fang Da rushes to the area, where a number of the Tangshan survivors



have united to form a rescue party. Fang Deng leaves her comfortable life and family in Canada to help as well. She is astounded one evening to hear a man nearby describing to his friend the circumstances of his injury in Tangshan. She realises this young man is her brother. The two are reunited but making peace with her mother's rejection is a different matter. It is only when she sees a woman trying desperately to recover her family from under the rubble that she comes to understand what a decision her mother had to make.

Despite taking some liberties with the book's plot, Xiaogang Feng's plot is credible and all too human. He doesn't rely on the CGI effects – his story is about the people. There is not a bad actor or actress in the film, even though some are not given much opportunity to show their talents. One I particularly liked is the actor who plays Fang Deng's adoptive Army officer father. I can't work out his name but his quiet, supportive understanding of Fang Deng's problems is the pivot around which her later life revolves.

Despite it not being a blockbuster in the traditional style the film now holds the record for the highest grossing Chinese film, taking over \$100 million so far. It deserves the same success on DVD.



**As Far As My Feet Will Carry Me**  
**R2**  
**Second Sight Films**

*Germany, Russian with Clear English subtitles*



The film is about the escape of German prisoner Clemens Forell from a Russian prison camp in Siberia and his long trek to return to his family. The film is supposedly based on a true story but there are inconsistencies in Forell's account that cast some doubt. The story is rather similar to a 1956 book by a Polish soldier, Slavomir Rawicz, who escaped from a Siberian camp and with a few friends made it to safety in British India. That story, *The Long Walk*, has many similarities to this later film. Rawicz's story also had some doubts about its accuracy. It was made into a film called *The Way Back* in 2010. Regardless of any doubts and antecedents *As Far As My Feet Will Carry Me* is still a superb film with a good plot and script, first class acting and wonderful cinematography.

The story starts with Clemens leaving for the Russian Front. His wife is pregnant with their second child. He promises his daughter that he will return from the war. That promise takes many years to keep.

Clemens is captured. As a German officer he is automatically regarded by the Russians as a spy and is sentenced in a kangaroo court to 25 years in Siberia. The prison camp serves a lead mine and prisoners often die from lead poisoning, hunger and typhoid. After four years Forell knows he must escape or he will die in captivity.



With the help of the German camp doctor he escapes. The Russians will expect him to head west, so he goes south instead. He struggles across the trackless snowfields of the Arctic Circle and survives the winter. In the great sub-Arctic forests of Siberia he is helped by a couple of escaped gold miners, but their help is shortlived when they fight each other over the gold they have stolen from the mining camp.

He falls in with a group of local reindeer herders near Yakutsk, and starts a liaison with the head man's widowed daughter. Learning that the Russians are now searching this area for him, he has to leave and continue his trek. He is relentlessly pursued by the Russian camp commandant who seems to take his escape personally.

Slowly Clemens makes his way through the new Soviet Republics until he is at the Turkish border. With freedom just across the border bridge, he is stunned to find the commander waiting for him. Although there is not a lot of action in the film, the tension is more than kept up by Clemens' constant brushes with the Russians. He must use a combination of bluff and self-reliance to keep going, helped only by his small amount of Russian. The cinematography captures Clemens' loneliness perfectly by contrasting him against the beautiful but largely empty scenery of the tundra, the forests and then the mountains. The few small kindnesses he is shown by people he meets also contrast with the harsh and bureaucratic Russian system. His inner strength is tested, and there are moments when he is on the verge of giving up, but over the course of his 3000 kilometre escape he toughens up.

We can find great satisfaction in his final arrival back home and his reunion with his family.



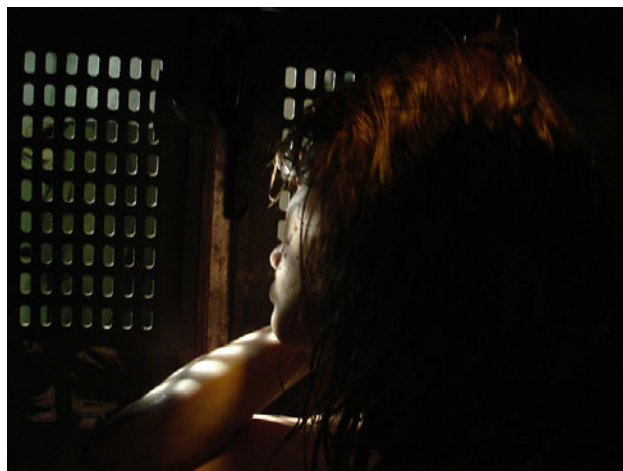
# **Breaking Nikki Redemption R2 DVD**

*Argentina  
English language*

This Argentinean film been unavailable for some time, but has now been re-released by Nigel Wingrove's Redemption label. In Synergy we look at a lot of foreign films that are first class – they just don't appeal to wider audiences because they often have subtitles. Breaking Nikki has an English soundtrack and a slick look that could have come from one of the better U.S. directors so it will be better received.

The action all takes place inside the home of Devon, a decidedly sick man. His wife Susan has left him but he has trouble letting go. He waits until she comes over to get some divorce papers signed then imprisons her in an old locker that is so small she can't stand upright or lie down to sleep. She is fed like an animal through a slot in the grille at the front of the locker by Devon's easily-dominated brother.

Devon decides if he can't have Susan he will make over someone in her likeness. The girl he selects is Nikki, a highclass call girl who is prepared to go along with the client's wishes, such as wearing Susan's expensive clothes. She is not too good at imitating someone else she doesn't know so falls back on her own techniques, which incurs Devon's wrath. He chains up Nikki and applies psychological pressure to



her to become the Susan he wants her to be. Here we find out just how seriously disturbed Devon is, and how savagely he can take that out on Nikki. His odd taste in home movies develops into a liking for water torture. Nikki has to fight to keep her own identity but every refusal to acquiesce and become Susan just brings her more torture.

Meanwhile the real Susan is working on brother David, trying to persuade him to let her go. Can both girls escape with their sanity intact?

The film is dark and grim. The only slight sign of humanity is in David but he is so controlled by his overbearing brother that we can't really look to him for the girls' salvation. He just goes through the motions at the orders of his increasingly demented brother.

Such a film would usually be slow and let the tension build up, but this one is full-on within a minute of the start. It deserves better than its previous short career.



**The Bridge (Die Brücke)**  
**War**  
**Eagle Entertainment**  
**R4**

*German with English subtitles or English over-dub*



Way back in 1959 Manfred Gregor's novel *Die Brücke* was made into a black and white film by the recovering West German film industry. I saw it on TV and it struck me as a particularly powerful anti-war film, one of the best I have seen and easily equal to *All Quiet On The Western Front*. It was a courageous film for its time since memories of the war were still fresh. Then the film seemed to disappear off the face of the earth although ideas from it turned up in a number of later films, the best of which was *Saving Private Ryan*.

In the last weeks of World War II a group of seven 16-year-old schoolboys is taken from their school in a quiet country town and conscripted into the army. The army is in disarray. Troops are absconding as the Americans advance, others are fleeing west to the Americans to avoid the advancing Russians. The town has so far been spared the full horror of war so the schoolboys are enjoying their lives to the fullest. In the army that changes quickly.

At the "training" camp they are placed under the command of a blustering corporal. They are put into uniform and given rifles, then shipped off to fight with no training at all. The corporal puts them off at the bridge in their own home town,



tells them to guard it so the convoys of injured soldiers can cross it, then he absconds.

The boys are leaderless. They don't know what to do or how to do it. A passing general gives them quick instructions on how to set up a defensive position then once again they are left to themselves. Fortunately they are well armed. The general has told them of a stores and supply depot nearby and they load up with machine guns and anti-tank weapons. This has all happened within twenty four hours and it takes a while for their town to find out that they are back.

Then their parents put pressure to bear on them to give it up and return to being schoolboys. The boys, however, now have a purpose in life and a responsibility.



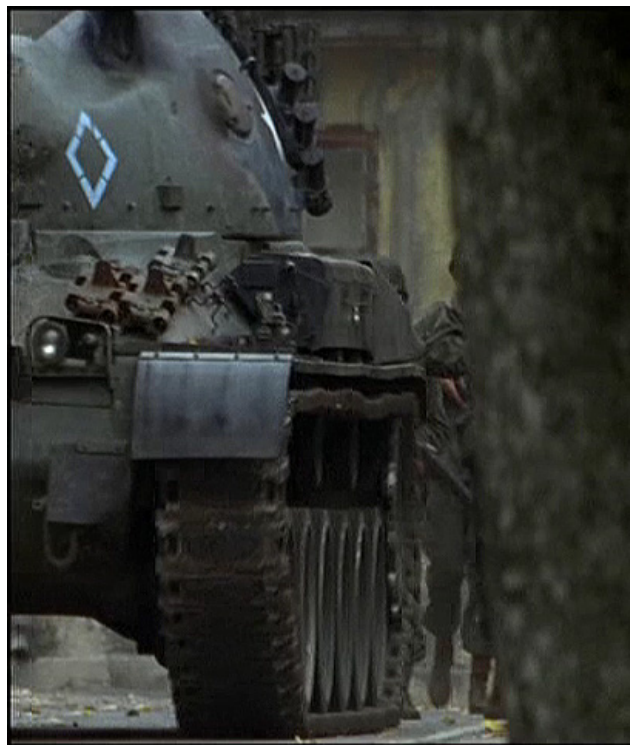




They have been indoctrinated for years about the “blood and honour” of fighting for their country and Fuhrer. They are united in their mission to guard the bridge at all costs.

An American patrol reinforced by a tank is the first to make contact. Although completely untrained the boys put up a creditable defence and the tank is destroyed. Another tank sent to reinforce the patrol suffers the same fate. The boys are overjoyed – it all seems so easy at first – but one by one their numbers are whittled down. Each loss is taken personally by the rest and their morale begins to suffer.

Unknown to them, a group of German engineers has been given orders to blow up the bridge to hold back the American or Russian advance. While the boys have been fighting, the engineers have completed their work. The boys were supposed to be withdrawn when the bridge was ready to be blown but, leaderless, they knew nothing of this. They take it very personally when the engineers announce their intention. They were ordered to save the bridge



and they WILL save it even if it now means fighting against their own side.

The director, Wolfgang Panzer, has given us a superb remake of this important film. He has managed without the massive budget of *Saving Private Ryan* and with a minimum of special effects. He has concentrated on the people of the town and how their personalities change when the war comes to them. Some, like the boys, become heroes. Far too many become dead. At the end of the film we are left to ask what was the point of wasting so many young lives in a war that was already lost?





**Essential Killing**  
**Poland**  
**Eagle Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

*English, Polish, Arabic*  
*with English subtitles*

Although the producers tried to reduce the political content of this film, there are some parts that must be political in order for the story to make sense. Many viewers will not progress past this part, and they will miss a great film.

A Taliban member in Afghanistan is taken prisoner after he kills three Americans with a rocket propelled grenade. Deafened by the blast he is unable to answer his interrogators' questions and is "waterboarded", a form of torture now known to have been used by the U.S. military. He would not be able to tell them much anyway. From flashbacks to his time before the Taliban it looks like he was simply hoodwinked into "fighting for Allah" by the words of a rabid Muslim cleric.

He is flown to an unknown location in middle Europe for transfer to a prison camp. On the way to the camp the vehicle crashes and he escapes into the snowy mountain wastes. The rest of the film covers his flight to ...where? He has no idea where he is or where to go. He is in an unfamiliar environment, starving, lonely and hunted by the military. He doesn't know the language so can't ask for help or even for his location. The mountains in winter are largely unpopulated anyway. Along the way he is forced to kill to survive, although he appears to have been



basically an ethical man before the Taliban.

The film is a little handicapped by the way the lead actor is set up. Vincent Gallo does not speak a word throughout the film and we don't see much of his face either, since it is covered with a bushy beard. He must do the best he can with body language, and that he does well. Conditions for him were unpleasant. In the mountains he had to walk barefoot through snow in temperatures as low as -35 degrees.

The story starts out vaguely, with his reasoning for joining the Taliban left rather uncertain. It finished vaguely, too, with nothing extra revealed or decided – it is simply his survival that the film focuses on. This brings up the film's only real weakness. The Director dwells lovingly on each scene to the point where it makes the film drag a little. Watching a man walk across a snowy clearing and enter the trees is OK, but extended close-ups of his bushy beard are not really necessary. It could have been edited a little tighter and about fifteen minutes cut out to keep it moving. Otherwise it is a good story beautifully filmed.





**The Malay Chronicles  
Bloodlines  
Malaysia  
Eagle Entertainment  
R4  
DVD and Blu-Ray**

The story is supposedly based very loosely on a Malaysian heroic tale, involving the adventures of Merong Mahawangsa around the first century A.D. He is a rogue, a heroic fighter and a bit of a womaniser. At this time the Romans were looking at securing the southern coastal trade routes to China. A young "prince" of Rome, Marcus Carpenius, is to marry one of the Chinese Emperor's favourite daughters to cement the trade relationship. The wedding will take place on an island that is regarded as neutral ground and will be the formal meeting point of the two cultures.

The Roman fleet is wrecked near Goa in a storm. It would be an insult to the Chinese Emperor to be late for his own wedding, so Marcus hires Merong and his ship to take them to the island. The seas are infested with Geruda pirates led by the unkillable Kemawas. They attack the party, kidnap the Princess and leave Marcus and Merong for dead.



Kemawas then demands a massive ransom from the Chinese or he will take the Princess for his own. Marcus knows a replacement Roman fleet will arrive shortly but with time running out they must act now. Merong has an ace – he may be the long-lost heir to the kingship of the Malays. He unites some of the villages and leads a raiding party to save the Princess.

Can they kill Kemawas, though, since he is protected by his magic amulet? Will the Roman troops arrive in time to help them? Why has the Chinese Emperor not paid the ransom?

The film is full of blood and slaughter, with action scenes piled on each other one after the other. The CGI effects are perfectly done and not over the top. With such a mixture of times and cultures the film could so easily have fallen flat, but the interaction of the cultures is well crafted and quite credible. There is not a boring moment in the film. It is well acted, wonderfully filmed and a credit to the production crew headed by Director Yusri Kru. We so rarely see films from south east Asia, but if there are more as good as this one, bring them on !



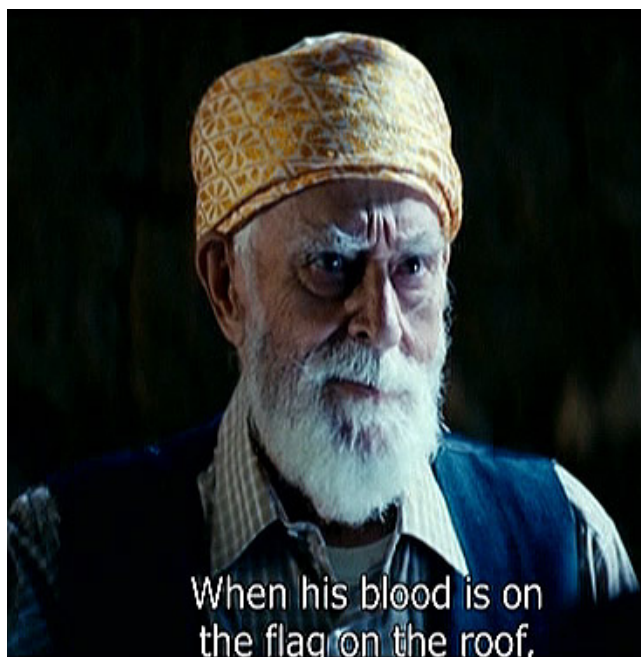
**The Terrorist**  
Human drama  
Turkey  
Eagle Entertainment  
R4 DVD

*English, Turkish with  
English subtitles*

Until now if you mentioned Turkish cinema I would think of the wonderful B grade matinee films being rereleased by Onar. This magnificent film changes that entirely. It is a finely scripted and well acted piece of drama that deals with Turkey's current problems.

Turkey is one of the world's few Muslim countries with a secular government. It has prospered and is the envy of many other Moslem countries, but it now has its problems. It has the Kurdish population in the north, a group of squabbling tribes who object to control from Istanbul. They engage in an increasing amount of terrorism in an effort to gain independence. The more radical Moslems, goaded on by Iran, want to see Turkey a full Moslem country and they are not above using terrorism to achieve their ends. The police in return must use increasingly violent methods to combat them.

Two anti-terrorist agents, Firat and Acar, have a lead on a major terrorist named Hadji who is living in New York. They go to New York to track him down, where the FBI is already at work.



They regard the man as the leader of a major terrorist organization based purely on the information of the Turkish security police. With the current paranoia about Moslem terrorists in the U.S. the ideals of justice are discarded. They have arrested him and will hand him over to the Turks without trial and deport him. There will be no court appearances, no legal representation. They do not need to prove guilt or innocence.

Firat and Acar are sent to New York to take him into custody, where they find he has escaped from custody. Surprisingly nobody outside the FBI believes he is Dajjal the terrorist. Even his name is different. Through a local Moslem cleric they make contact with him, but he is protected by one of the local Moslem Negro gangs. Hajji makes them an offer – live with him for a few days, then if they still believe he is a terrorist they can do as they wish with him.

They find Hadji is a different man to what they were led to expect. He is a gentle man, a scholar who knows his Koran, and he counsels against violence using passages from the Koran to support his case. Gradually they realise that there is more to this man than they thought, and the idea that he could be a terrorist is replaced by the certainty that he is not the man they are after.





The FBI has been at work, though, and Hadji is recaptured and shipped back to Turkey for trial. Here once again he proves to be a gentle man of honour. In the cell next to him is a true radical cleric who believes in spreading the Koran by killing all non-Moslems. The contrast between this poisonous old man and Hadji could not be greater and even the head of the Turkish anti-terrorist squad now believes in Hadji's innocence.

He is released with apologies and decides while he is in Turkey he will visit his mother in Biltis.



Firat and Acar decide to go with him.

Meanwhile the head of the squad is investigating how such an obviously innocent man came to be accused of being a terrorist. What he finds sheds new light on Hadji's history. There are personal vengeance and vendettas to be sorted out, not just political problems.

The film is beautifully executed. Technically it is a credit to the Turkish film industry. The acting is perfect, including a role for Danny Glover as the New York cleric. Even the theme and background music are perfect for the film – sombre but not overpowering. Eagle Entertainment is to be congratulated for picking up this film. If nothing else it highlights the internal problems facing Turkey and compares it with the excesses of the U.S. and the radical Moslems themselves.



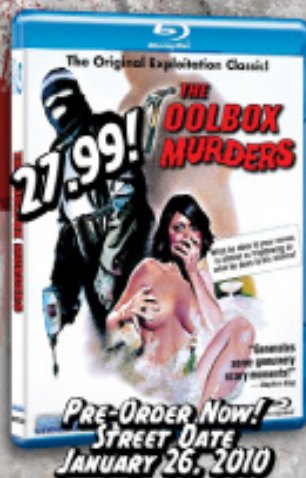
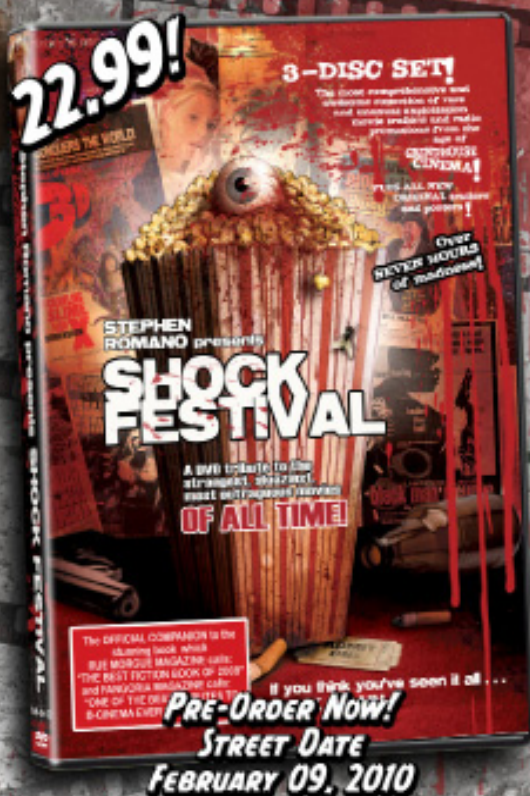


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